

GONE AFIELD



TO THE READER

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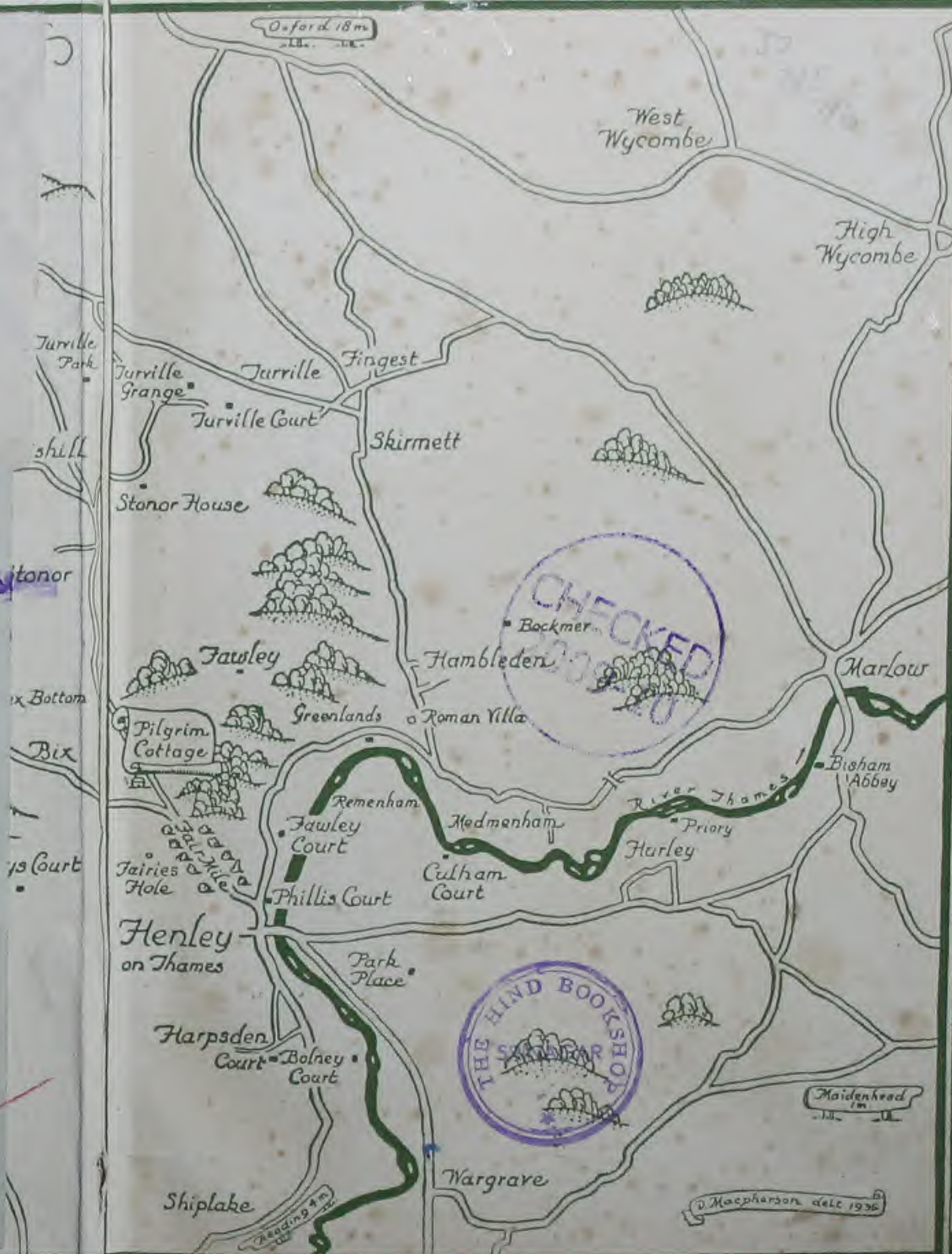
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GONE AFIELD

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GONE AFIELD CECIL ROBERTS



HODDER & STOUGHTON
LIMITED • LONDON

GONE AFIELD

FIRST PRINTED . . . APRIL 1936

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GONE RAMBLING

FIRST PRINTED	.	.	.	APRIL	1935
REPRINTED	.	.	.	APRIL	1935
REPRINTED	.	.	.	APRIL	1935
REPRINTED	.	.	.	SEPTEMBER	1935

GONE RUSTIC

FIRST PRINTED	.	.	.	APRIL	1934
REPRINTED	.	.	.	MAY	1934
REPRINTED	.	.	.	JULY	1934
REPRINTED	.	.	.	OCTOBER	1934
REPRINTED	.	.	.	APRIL	1935
REPRINTED	.	.	.	SEPTEMBER	1935

Made and Printed in Great Britain.
Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., London and Aylesbury.

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CHAPTER I

INVASION

To wake on a summer's morning, with the sun streaming in the small dormer window, to catch a glimpse of crimson rambler flaming along the trellis, to see the green sweep of the beechwoods in full leafiness, to hear distinctly an early gardener rolling the lawn, to wake, in short, on a July morning, with the promise of a perfect day ahead—what more could a lucky creature desire?

I was, I reflected, sitting up in bed, that lucky creature. It was seven-thirty, and the unfailing step along the landing of a cheerful housekeeper bringing morning tea and letters made me alert. I looked round the tiny bedroom. The ceiling billowed above me, its fantastic bulges threatening imminent collapse. But for several hundred years that collapse has threatened the sleepers in Pilgrim Cottage. When the electricians went into the roof to run the wires through, I was so filled with apprehension that I left for Greece, fearful my nerve would give way, or theirs, with my fussing at every yard they crawled and every hole they made.

Like a rich maiden aunt, my ceiling is robustly decrepit, and the final collapse, long threatened, never occurs. Indeed, on my return after that anxious absence, the electricians had come through everywhere that they wished and nowhere that they had not

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wished ; not a crack, not a bulge, not a flake of plaster betrayed their involved labours. When I expressed my admiration the foreman gave me a wry smile.

“ You should have seen our tools, sir. It’s as bad as going through iron plates—that old oak will be holding up your tiles when all the Building Society plantations are weed-grown.”

So I no longer expect to die like Desdemona, smothered in the night. Will that old ceiling, curving above me, be the last thing my mortal eyes will look upon when . . . ?

But we are waking cheerfully this sunny morning, the thrushes are singing, the starlings are chattering, and the two Cornish women, who make Devonshire cream in this corner of Oxfordshire, are moving their cows down the lane. “ How nice to have cows down the lane ! ” said a visitor, a little prematurely, not looking where she stepped. Very nice indeed, until one of them mourns a calf through the watches of the night.

The footsteps on the landing, announcing morning tea with the morning mail, belong to Ethel. I anticipate the tap on the door, the click of the latch, the cheerful “ Good morning, Mr. Roberts ! ” the rattle of rings as the curtains are drawn back, and the verdict, after a moment’s gaze through the latticed side window on to the larchwood, “ It’s a lovely morning ! ”

The tea deposited on the bedside table, there is a bundle of letters which I observe with mingled excitement and despair. Once upon a time any letter un-

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opened filled me with excitement. Envelopes have such an endless variety in colour, shape, texture, handwriting, and postmarks. Some arrive expected, some arrive awakening pleasant memories, and some present pure mystery. Altrincham—who did I know at Altrincham? Where was it, anyhow, and who on earth in Altrincham should be writing to me? It was opened first.

A lady living in *The Bird's Nest*, who is a friend of Mrs. Barry, who knows my cottage (who is Mrs. Barry?), has followed Mrs. Barry's suggestion that I might be interested in the doyleys that she crochets, as they give an old-world appearance to the table. Mrs. Barry suggested . . .

Hang Mrs. Barry, whoever she is, oldy-worldy busy-body! And doyleys, why doyleys? there's something preposterous in the very word. What are doyleys exactly? I ask Ethel. She explains. They would be very nice for the cake dishes. . . . I begin to see myself getting involved in *The Bird's Nest*, and hurriedly turn to the next letter.

I read my letters in bed. I like them hot from the postman's bag. There are strange human beings who exercise a quite unnatural self-control in the presence of letters. They eat their breakfast ignoring them. They let them lie by the plate, like unwanted children on an orphanage doorstep, or leave them in the hall, frigid on a silver salver, or damp by an umbrella stand. I could not treat my thirteenth child in that fashion. I must know the worst or the best, or the quite unimportant, at once.

It is strange that I am not yet cured of the excitement

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unopened letters arouse in me. Once upon a time I loved receiving letters, now I groan at the monstrous burden imposed upon me each morning. As one grows older the ever-widening circle of acquaintance necessitates a weeding-out process. One cannot dissipate one's energy indefinitely. Difficult though the process may be, it can be performed delicately, and, however meekly sociable one is, one becomes adept at not knowing any more people, or, more defensively, at reducing the known number. It often resolves itself into a battle in which the invaders' weapons are the motor-car, the telephone, and the amiable mutual friend who has "just brought them along ; you don't mind, do you ? "

The letter, however, requires no introduction, no personal link. It walks right into one's home through the letter-box, door locked or unlocked. I suppose people, really nice people, who are actuated only by kindness when they transmit their thanks or reactions, never think that the last thing an author wants to do when he has finished writing is to take a busman's holiday and write letters in reply. If only we could receive letters with no obligation to acknowledge them ! Some people do. I envy their toughness. When I have attempted a stern silence my imagination gets to work, and I see some highly sensitive boy, a Shelley in the chrysalis stage, or a lonely Charlotte Brontë in a forbidding vicarage, deeply mortified by my silence after their fitful act of courage in exposing their emotions. And, of course, authors themselves like letters from readers. I had a friend who was often a guest of Pierre Loti's, and he told me how, in old age, Loti would

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listen for the postman, rush to the door, and, if there were no letters, sadly exclaim, "The world forgets me!"

Twenty-two letters this morning, three pure business, one pure insolence, seventeen very friendly from America, Kenya Colony, Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere, and one from *The Bird's Nest*. The seventeen are put aside with a firm decision not to answer them. But I shall not burn them for a few days . . . procrastination is the thief of postage stamps, and I know I shall succumb. But why, oh why, do they want my photograph? Fate has given me a Protean face. In normal life I believe it is fairly pleasant. But who is this dreadful object that appears before the camera?—slit-eyed, criminal-mouthed, Grock-headed, sallow, and vicious, and obviously one who seems destined for a criminal's gallery. Now there is Mr. Slush, whose face is better than his books. He has been living on that face for thirty years of perennial youth. I cannot estimate how many signed portraits he has despatched with alacrity, how many girl's dressing-tables he decorates, how many hearts his fair, alcohol-pressed curl has caught in its tangles. Yet in real life he is as plain as his prose. He was born with a camera-face, and Hollywood is his obvious home. He looks picturesque, whether caught drooping over the side of his sports car, sitting on the stairs at a hunt ball, or posing as one of our younger statesmen at a civic dinner. Spiteful people have hinted that there is a lot of work done on that face in private, underpinning and lifting and grouting, but probably that is falsehood. He is an infallible camera object, born, as it were, a perfect picture. Lucky fellow!

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Last year an enterprising newspaper put my face on all the Underground Railways. I met myself on the escalators. My friends indignantly repudiated me (in the frame), and after a few hours of the Mussolini-Al Capone-Grock menace, I fled from London. No, Miss Brown, I shall not send you an autographed photo. So far I have discovered no camera or artist who can give me the plainest justice. And, anyhow, authors should be read and not seen.

I turn to the newspaper, but not to the news. The world may be in flames, but this morning I am simply egotistical, I am merely looking for myself.

“ It was a quarter-past seven, a dew-jewelled morning in July. The lawn glistened, there was a faintness in the surrounding scene that prophesied another glorious day. Coming to a gap in the hedge, Mrs. Braintree looked down the valley in which Pilgrim Cottage lay. . . .”

That paragraph occurs in the morning's paper, from a novel of mine being serialised in it. It is almost prophetic. It was written, not on a dew-jewelled morning of July, but on a damp, dank November evening in London. And now it appears in print, true in every detail, for there is an early heat mist in the valley ; the lawn, I see, peering out, is sparkling with dew. Like Mrs. Braintree, I will go forth into the garden and contemplate the weeding I ought to do.

My clothing is of the simplest. A pair of rubber sand slippers, and a swimming-slip. For the rest I wear a dark coat of tan achieved with garden sunbathing, and a little carry-over from last year's Lido.

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I gaze out of the window. The thrushes are walking the lawn, their legs wet to their spotted stomachs. The milk cart has rattled down the lane to *The Golden Ball*, and, afar, I hear a motor-car ascending the hill towards Oxford. I consider whether I shall roll the lawn before my bath and paddle up and down in the dew, or have my bath and then roll the lawn, or . . .

The telephone ringing downstairs brings the outside world breaking in upon me. I am wanted, and scamper down the narrow creaking stairs, so narrow that a hole has been cut in the floor for a coffin chute for three centuries of deaths in the cottage. I race through the dining-room, the south room, and into the study, bright with chintz and books, black-beamed ceiling and crimson-rugged floor, a jumble of colour in a room flooded with sunlight, to find Ethel saying, "Yes. Yes. Yes." She looks up at my approach. "London wants you," she says.

London wants me, indeed ! Let it want me, I feel like retorting on this lovely July morning. A race of martyrs, crammed in Underground carriages or jammed in buses and trains, is drawing into grey Waterloo, grim Victoria, grimy London Bridge, or liverish Liverpool Street. Politically they are free human beings, but a desk without chains tethers them through all the hours of sunshine, all the years of youth and manhood. Hundreds of fresh-faced boys, new from the cricket pitch and the football field, are tugging at their invisible leashes, while anxious fathers watch their prancings, hoping they will get broken in without too many traces snapping. Soon they will be suburban

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trotters, the blinkers of custom over their keen young eyes, the whip of necessity playing loosely over their springy flanks. At the week-ends the bit is unfastened, they are turned loose in the fields, the young ones rear and prance, the old ones munch and amble, till Monday morning comes with the familiar, deadening routine.

London wants me—the phrase menaces me with shades of the prison from which I have escaped. What can London want of me at eight o'clock in the morning? Not business, for the typists' milk-bottles are still on office steps. Has my expected guest from Paris, the faithful Louis, arrived in London, for, like a homing pigeon, he flies back to the cottage we first entered together, and always his haste is such that he crosses the Channel by night that he may breakfast in the room whence he can see the four poplars he turned into French poodles by shaving their trunks and leaving their heads bushy?

No, the voice is not French, it is American, or seems so.

"Is that you, Mr. Roberts?"

"Yes."

"Oh-er! I'm afraid you won't know me!" says a lady's voice with a transatlantic timbre.

"No?"

"No—I feel it's very dreadful. I'm speaking from an hotel in London. I'm Miss Rhys, from Toronto, and I'm here with my friend Miss Orrifer, from Montreal. . . ."

A long pause.

"Hello—hello!" I say. "Yes?"

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"Why, Mr. Roberts, I feel we shouldn't, but we're over here on a quick trip, and we've read *Gone Rustic* and *Gone Rambling*, and we just feel we *must* see Pilgrim Cottage. I know we shouldn't ask you, and it must be a terrible nuisance—but if we came down, could we see it, if only for a few minutes?"

I suppress a groan. This is not quite as bad as the misguided young woman who cycled all night from Farnham, and woke Ethel at 6 a.m. by cooee-ing under my bathroom window. Yesterday, Memphis, Tenn., walked into my garden, six foot of the Declaration of Independence, accompanied by a true Daughter of the American Revolution.

"Sir!" he said, reaching for a hand that held the rose syringe, "pleased to know you. We're on our way to Ireland. Will you autograph my wife's book? Say, then it's all true. Well! Old England, eh?"

"Sixty-eight deep," I said, recovering breath.

But he was not looking at the well, and he merely added an 's' to his next ejaculation.

"Swell!" he said, ecstatically.

A car that could almost have carried the cottage bore them away in five minutes. I could not help liking them. They were much better than the Yorkshireman who climbed on the dustbin-lid outside my gate to get a view. It collapsed, and I had to buy a new one. And franker than the woman who made a hole in the hedge with her umbrella and came through it. I should never have known had I not seen the hedge shaking, and thinking it was a dog or a bird fight, or other of Nature's perpetual scimmages, I

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do not empty the washbowls in the bedrooms, wipe safety-razors on towels, want three pairs of boots cleaning, take all the garden cushions, turn the radio on from morning till night, forget bread-and-butter letter, and want something forgotten sent on.

"Tony," I said, "put on a shirt—ladies coming."

"Ladies—what sort of ladies?" The mowing-machine stopped, the hair was jerked back.

"Surely ladies are ladies?" I protested.

"Oh yes—but young ones or old ones?"

"I hope my hospitality doesn't depend——"

"Oh, don't be tiresome," he retorted; "you know what I mean."

"Yes—and I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. They're old ladies, or middle-aged ones, from Canada—cottage fans!"

Tony groaned. "But why do you do it? Why do you let them bother you?"

"Why do I?" I repeated, despairingly. "And I'm fetching them from the station."

"I shall not put on a shirt. I shall take off my costume. It's preposterous. Why should you have your morning wrecked?"

"I'm weak, I suppose. But I couldn't let them walk—not all that way on a hot morning like this."

"They'll only waste your time—I don't know how you get any work done at all—it's become a procession!"

"Obsession," I corrected.

"You ought to make a charge—two shillings a time. That would stop 'em—and give the result to some charity."

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"That's a bright idea," I agreed, "and a shilling extra to see me at my desk—feeding-time at the zoo, as it were ; takings for the Authors' Benevolent Fund, but I shall spell it Author's, and let charity begin at home. Seriously, what can I do ? "

"Let 'em walk if they must ! " said Tony, unsympathetically.

"That would be adding to the existing disparity in economic distribution. Rich people with cars experience no fatigue in making themselves a nuisance, while poor people, anxious in the cause of literature to visit the shrine of the master, have to——"

I dodged a well-aimed handful of grass.

"You are an ass ! " exclaimed Tony.

"Then you should have thrown hay ! " I said, retreating hurriedly.

Indoors I looked at the clock. They would be here in an hour. I went upstairs. I searched in a drawer for white flannels, and socks, and a shirt. I groaned. It was a grand day for doing nothing and wearing nothing. I consoled myself with the thought that I was entertaining Dominion visitors, I was doing something for the unity of the British Empire. If they had been Americans it would have been for the English-speaking Races ; if they had been Slovaks or Greeks or Rumanians it would have been for the League of Nations. Where there's a weak will there's an excuse.

I had a shock at the station, where I waited at the ticket gate. Tall ladies, small ladies, fat ladies, slim ladies all passed by, lacking the transatlantic face.

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Had they missed the train, or were they still waddling up the platform, poor dears? And how would they know me? I did not look like an author. Goodness only knows how an author looks. And I did not look as if I had gone rustic, I hoped.

A young woman smiled at me.

"Oh, Mr. Roberts!"

I turned. She was young, she was pretty, she was slim and chic.

I recovered, and prepared to meet 'the friend with me,' who is always awful. But she wasn't awful, she was lovely.

I shepherded them into the car, all of us a little shy. They just couldn't believe it was true. Neither could I. Neither would Tony. When did they arrive in England? I asked.

"Yesterday."

"For how long?"

"Four days. We're doing a quick European tour, and this is the end. We've been in Paris and Rome and Venice and Vienna and Budapest, and Munich and Heidelberg and down the Rhine, and Amsterdam and The Hague and Brussels and——"

"You're rather tired, I expect," I broke in.

"Oh no, not tired. We're loving every moment of it."

"Everybody's so nice—except a young man in the pool at Monte Carlo," began the friend, "who——"

"I said it was the Latin touch," interrupted the other.

"I've never heard it called that," I said.

Henley Bridge drew an ejaculation of delight. I felt

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pleased. I had expressly gone round that way for the *coup d'œil*. They rose to it. I liked them still more. And when I opened the cottage gate, and they stood in the path, taking deep breaths of admiration, I felt like a mother with the wonder baby at the parish meeting. For they did not ask the witless, crabbed questions that come to the lips of some people. "Isn't it damp?" "How do you get your groceries?" "Isn't it awfully quiet?" "Can you stop the roof leaking?" when they should realise that even a squint-eyed child is thought beautiful by its mother. They looked at the cottage, bless them, as though they knew it were very dear to my heart and had cost me a lot of money, thought, labour, and long loving to give it the patina it had attained.

Then, their appreciative comments over, we made the grand tour. Here again they were so charming and simple in their pleasure, that I did not mind repeating my curator's rôle, for of late I have come to feel at moments like the curator of Shakespeare's birthplace or Wordsworth's cottage, who must long to exclaim: "Yes, the damn poet did live here, and if he was one-tenth as sick of it as I am, God help him!"

I overhear myself going through the familiar patter—"This is where the spit was. You'll see the hole cut in the mantelshelf where the cord from the wheel came through. No, that is not a powder cupboard; it's where they kept the salt dry. Yes, very old hinges—seventeenth-century ironwork." I struck against lecturing in America, where, after four tours, I heard myself like a rutted gramophone disk, churning out the same sentences with the same sure vocal responses

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of laughter or lachrymose sniffs. I felt ashamed of drugging the public with doses of eloquence that started impromptu and, after a week, flowed like petrol in a road-side pump.

Once, while making the tour and coming to the long portrait of an ancestor, an innocent child whose smile the brush of Lawrence had captured on the wing, I swear I suffered a reincarnation. I became an old housekeeper of forty years' service—discreet in black, and quick-eyed for sticky-fingered children touching the brocade chairs—who had arrived at the blue drawing-room, and, pulling back the silk cover, began, raising my wand—"This is a portrait of the fifth Duke, as a boy. By Sir Thomas Lawrence. In fancy dress. Note the small dog. Its eyes will follow you wherever you are. He planned the South Garden, and was the Governor of New Guinea for five years. His Duchess is the second portrait on the right, by Hoppner. She was very beautiful, she died young. What? No, sir, he was not eccentric. The legend that he carried his wife's ashes in his snuff-box is quite unfounded. Follow me, and please do not walk on the parquet; it is of padouka wood—there are only two of its kind in England. When George IV slipped on it, it is said he lay there for five minutes and would not let anyone help him up. It has never been polished since."

An hallucination of a moment's duration, and then I escaped from the bombazine dress. But I felt it was a warning. Miss Rhys and Miss Orrifer, however, did not make me feel I was performing a hackneyed rôle. When we had finished we came to the seats

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under the apple-tree, and the drinks on the table. After a few minutes, all shyness gone on the part of my visitors, they began to tell me about their life in Canada.

"My friend here," said the fair one, "had a legacy of two thousand dollars left to her, and she has always been crazy to come to Europe. So one day she made up her mind to come, and asked me to come with her, offering to pay for me. That was too much to resist, so we threw up our jobs—and here we are!"

"You threw up your jobs—you mean, you haven't taken leave, they won't be there for you to go back to?" I asked.

"Yes, we threw them up!" cried the fair one. "They wouldn't let us go off for two months. It was a bit of a struggle, for I had a good job. I was secretary in a stockbroker's office. I had a nice room, oak-panelled, on the fifteenth floor, with a lovely view over the St. Lawrence. And there was a canteen, and a country club—it was rather difficult to throw up all that, knowing how many folks are unemployed just now. But I thought it all out, my friend offered to take me, she's running just the same risk. When the money's all spent, we'll both have to stand in a queue for a job!"

"I think you're amazing," exclaimed Tony, in admiration. "What pluck!"

The dark one laughed and showed pretty teeth.

"I do sometimes pinch myself and ask if it's me. I did this morning, when I walked out of the hotel and saw a London policeman, and London buses, and the

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fountains in Trafalgar Square, and Big Ben. I've dreamed and dreamed for years of seeing London, knowing I never should—and then this legacy fell out of the sky. It wasn't enough to live on, and money has a way of disappearing anyhow, so I said, 'Here goes—I'll go to Europe for two months, and I'll get Isabel to come with me.' And here we are, and we've had a wonderful time, and it's something no one can ever, ever take away from us."

"Like being here and really seeing this cottage we've read about!" said Isabel. "When we're back I guess we'll wonder if we dreamed it all."

"You'll get jobs when you're home again?" asked Tony.

"That scares us just a little bit, but we're not thinking about it just now. We've one more week, and we're not looking for any clouds on the horizon. When we get back we'll have about twenty dollars in hand, for we planned it all very carefully to see as much as possible by economising. I'll stay with my people in the country for a week or two to get down to earth, and then I'll join the queue waiting for jobs. We'll survive somehow!"

"Of course you'll survive! I think you're wonderful," said Tony, with eyes shining in excited admiration. "If you can do this you can do anything."

"If I were your employer I should take you on again at double salary. Enterprise like yours is a valuable quality," I said.

"Let's hope they see it like that!" laughed Miss Rhys. "And now, Mr. Roberts, I think we ought to

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go. You've been so very kind giving up your time, and letting us visit. We shall never forget it."

"I'll motor you into Henley. You can lunch there at the Elizabethan House, an old café where they say Sherriff wrote his *Journey's End*, while coaching a crew. I've never asked him if it's true for fear of killing the legend. He's here this Regatta, coaching a varsity crew, so it's probably true. You know they say truth's stranger than fiction? Actually I find that it's exactly like fiction. You, for instance."

"Me?" asked Miss Rhys, puzzled.

"Years ago I wrote a novel around a typist who received a legacy when her mother died—insurance money. She threw up her job and gave herself a holiday in the Tyrol—just as you've done," I explained.

"What happened to her in the end?" asked Miss Orrifer.

"She fell in love with the innkeeper, an impoverished Austrian Count, and married him."

"We met no innkeepers like that!" laughed Miss Rhys.

She gave a last glance at the cottage, and seemed astonished that I should ask them to sign my Visitors' Book.

"But look at the names in it—there's all the authors I've ever——"

"I feel you belong to fiction as much as any of them—a story come true—so don't hesitate," I interrupted.

They signed, then went over to the car, and we took them into Henley, where we left them, full of gratitude

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and happy with their adventure. For a moment we watched them go down the wide old street, gay with bunting, towards the café and the bridge, then I turned the car homewards.

"Whenever I hear the names Toronto and Montreal I shall always think of them," declared Tony, earnestly.

"O God! O Montreal!"

"What did you say?"

"I was quoting a famous poem written by a man in despair," I explained.

"Are you in despair?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"About an hour ago, in protest against my weakness, you said, 'But why do you do it? Why do you let 'em bother you?' Well, supposing I hadn't done it, supposing I had been firm, inhospitable, invisible——"

"It would have been awful," Tony groaned. "They were so nice, really very nice. I think they're heroic. And I'm sure they enjoyed the visit enormously. They looked so happy."

"Very happy," I agreed. "It's taught me a lesson."

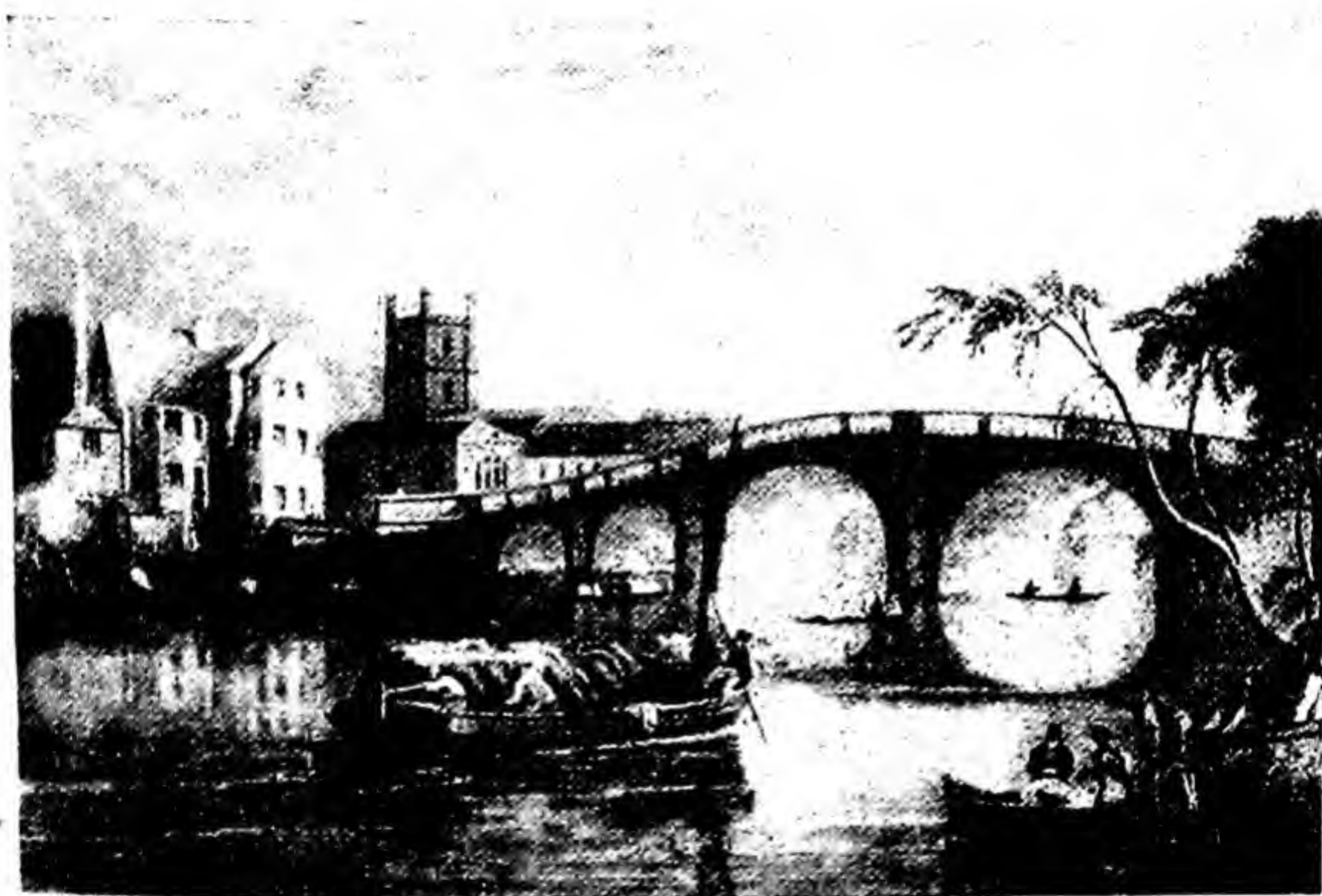
"How?"

"Well, in the first place, to live with courage like they're doing—and also I'll never again be ungracious, not even if they rattle my latch, crawl through my hedge, or clamber up on my dustbin. For you never know. They may have come all the way across the Atlantic, and be spending their last ten pounds."

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"Yes—it would be awful, I see now," agreed Tony.

"But it means I'll have to go on being disturbed, and spied on, and—O God! O Montreal!" I exclaimed as the car drew up at the gate.



HENLEY BRIDGE.

THE VETERANS

*Four old men by the haycart stand,
Each with a hayfork lending a hand,
Tossing the hay in the sunset glow
As they tossed it sixty years ago.*

*Said Charlie Sharp, nigh eighty-nine,
" Haycrops these days aren't as fine ! "
Said old Mark Harman, eighty-five,
" Nor mown as well as with a scythe."*

*Said old James Rixon, eighty-two,
" Nothing's the same, nor me, nor you."
" Speak for yourself ! " said Reuben Pace,
And tossed a forkful in its place.*

*Seated on chairs by the cottage door
Where the pear-tree grows on the wall, their four
Old wives talked in the evening sun,
One ninety, one eighty, two eighty-one !*

CHAPTER II

OF TURNPIKES AND BRICKS

I

WITHIN the green hedge that surrounds my tiny domain, for I am settled on an island between one live road, one almost dead road, and a bridle-path, it is easy to live oblivious of the outer world. When I lock my garden gate only the sky and a circle of hills look in on me. The procession of days flows by, and often, in semi-panic, I turn to the calendar to see whether I am not due to make an appearance in the outer world. It was never my intention to become a recluse, but a man with a lawn to mow, a garden to tend, a workshop to tinker in, even excluding books to write or read, finds the clock ever racing ahead of him, and Saturday dawning, when he must pull himself together.

Pulling oneself together, I find, means discarding the really disreputable trousers in which one can crawl over a roof or under a car. It means getting one's finger-nails clean of paint and scrubbed to some kind of passable appearance. How often at a public dinner or meeting where I find myself due to stand on my feet, correctly attired, do I find myself glancing covertly at my fellow-speakers. Were they, four hours ago, mixing mortar, grubbing up old bulbs, soldering the

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watering-can, or re-leathering the bathroom tap, surrounded by tools and happy in old trousers or boots? Will their nails, or their roughened skin, betray them? Once my neighbour at the public ordeal was a well-known, hard-working bishop. Something I noticed gave me the clue.

"I see you love tinkering, my lord," I said.

He looked at me sharply, suspicious that I might be criticising his personal character, and inclined to resent my rudeness.

"Oh?" he said, in a Prayer-book voice.

"I spend a lot of time in the workshop myself. I know the sign—you've got a blood-blister on the top of the left thumb. You've been using a hammer?"

His face cleared at once and expanded in a smile.

"How extraordinary you should spot that! You're quite right! I'm cabinet-making, and yesterday I gave myself an awful bang with a hammer."

For five minutes we talked hobbies. He had had to give up gardening owing to delicate health, and had taken to carpentering in a room of his palace. For two months he had been making a china cupboard.

"It's really very wrong of me to be taking so much time off, but I do enjoy it, and it's relaxing."

"And appropriate," I commented; then, seeing he had not caught the point. "Wasn't your Chief a carpenter?"

"That's given me an idea—thank you!" he said, gratefully, and leaning forward made a note on the

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back of his menu card. Twenty minutes later he most cleverly utilised the blood-blister and the attic workshop in his speech.

Most men dream of the time when they can retire and pursue their hobbies. If they ever cease to cherish that dream, then they are dead to life. I still keep dozens of dreams ; there's the private printing-press, wood-carving, tapestry-weaving, book-binding in choice leathers, playing the piano really well, speaking good German, having all my papers systematically filed, walking——

Walking ! How dismally I have failed in this respect ! When I came to Pilgrim Cottage I bought twenty six-inch-to-one-mile maps and systematically planned a survey of my neighbourhood. I hopefully sketched out a ten-mile radius, and after four years I have not completed a five-mile radius. In excuse there is the fact that these Chiltern Hills are very complex and baffling. There is a labyrinth of foot-paths through dense woods, innumerable ' Commons ' and deep ravines plunging into valleys and ' Bottoms.' I live in a loop of the Thames, which is like a bow, of which the road from Henley to Wallingford is the chord.

Then again, living in the country and going rustic does not mean becoming unsociable. There is more hospitality offered and received in the country than ever there is in the town. Most of it arises from kindness and sociability, some perhaps from curiosity. For while no one wants to know anything about his neighbours in a London street, and resents any curiosity they might show, one cannot curb curiosity

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about the people behind a mile of park wall, or dwelling in an historic house, or seen driving into the market town every Thursday.

In a great city you are part of a crowd, in the country you are at once a character, for better or worse. There goes Mrs. B., who is really quite obscure, but is 'famous' for putting up an umbrella in church to keep off the draught from the door, or Mr. J., who, oddly enough, wears a straw-hat in winter and a billy-cock in summer. Every county possesses a few rich personalities. Yet there is a uniformity, an inevitable law of demand and supply operating even here. I have frequently played the 'Colonel-game,' which I invented some years ago, and which friends have adopted with great success. You walk into a village inn and say to mine host or the local gathering, "And how's the Colonel getting on?" It rarely fails. There is always a supply of stories about Colonel This or Colonel That, who is a local notability. In Hampshire I should turn the enquiry to the Commander, remembering that county's favour as a retiring place for sailors.

In the country one visits and is visited. Past my cottage on six days of every week a high, square-topped car, driven by a neat, square-jawed chauffeur, passes, carrying within a remarkable lady, a figure in Edwardian society, who takes tea with her neighbours within a radius of fifteen miles. No Parliamentary candidate combs his constituency with the thoroughness of this lady making her rounds. Woe to the hostess whose tea-tray does not appear promptly at four-thirty. Her genial but disciplined social activity

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always recalls to my mind Browning's poet of Valladolid :

*We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew !*

who went

*. . . about and took account
Of all thought, said and acted, then went home
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King.*

Then how hard, though pleasantly, we all work from Saturday to Monday, when the rest of the world is resting ! In four years my cottage has housed some six hundred week-end guests. What fetching and returning to the station, often at midnight and day-break, what organisation of beds, considerations of menu, plans for excursions, carrying of cushions to shady corners, to the sun-bathing platform, transport of bathing-parties, or quest of the favourite newspaper, cigarette, drink or special diet ! On Monday the quiet falls again, the ripples die out on the placid waters, one goes back to the writing-desk or the work-bench, and the congestion in the cloakroom is ended. But how soon it is Friday evening again ! Sometimes one goes to London for a rest. Yet this pleasure of giving hospitality must be counted one of the real assets of country life. You possess your guests in pleasant circumstances of leisure. The two-hundred-face cocktail party is London's mode, not ours. We select and

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enjoy and become slightly confessional with our guests, and they for their part have memories—"Do you remember last year the cherry-blossom was just out?" or "Those beech leaves we took lasted us right into March."

When my resources for home amusement are exhausted, I estimate that there are a good twenty years of investigations to be made within ten miles of my gate. There are old houses with rich archives to be looted, a pageant of history mouldering away in libraries, attics, and lumber rooms. I have, for instance, sadly neglected the river Thames that runs liquid history within two miles of me. From Henley Bridge to Marlow Bridge, some seven miles, there is not only a stretch of the loveliest sylvan scenery in the world, and as a wide traveller I do not use this phrase ignorantly, there are old abbeys and houses that are the very fabric of English history. In the course of that short water journey, made by Roman, Saxon, Danish, Norman, Tudor, Jacobean, and Georgian travellers, we pass Medmenham Abbey, Hurley Priory, and Bisham Abbey. From each of these we will presently extract a little of their lore in the course of enjoying their hospitality, for they are all occupied to-day, and one of them, Bisham, has a record of unbroken occupation for six hundred years.

For the moment we will not go riverwards, but, leaving my gate and keeping to the old Roman (Oxford) road that winds up the hill, go to Bix Common, at a height of four hundred feet, where we will strike the old Henley turnpike on our route to Nettlebed, which proudly calls itself the highest settlement in Oxford-

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shire. Bix Common is really common. It somehow escaped the grabbing that followed the Enclosure Act, and various parts of it are still divided between the Rector and the local farmers. For three years out of ten they can do what they like with their special portions, either plough them or enclose them, but for the remaining seven years they are common land to the joint owners. Beyond the three or four houses that are clustered at a corner of the Common we join the main Oxford road, which now by-passes the small hamlet. A few yards farther on we come to an old toll-house, which marked the beginning of the Henley Turnpike. It is now the village post-office, and I hope it may long be allowed to linger, a survival of the old coaching days when roads began to emerge from dirt-tracks. But why turnpike? The term arose probably from the pole or pike turnable on a post that allowed foot-travellers to pass but stopped vehicles and cattle. This name seems, in its earliest derivation, to have been applied to a pike set up to bar the way. Thus in 1649 there is a record of payment by the Henley wardens 'for tymber which was part of the rayles sett up in the streets as turne picks in tyme of the warres.'

The law sanctioned the erection of gates or toll-houses when the Road Trusts came into existence. Toll-houses were built, most of them mean-looking dwellings, in which the toll collector dwelt. Naturally, his house had a look-out window on an angle at each side. A few of these houses were quite handsome and some of them carried clocks on their fronts, but these were for utility, not ornament, as also the lanterns

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which surmounted them, to guide travellers on dark nights. The clock 'timed' the road user. Post-horses could return free along the turnpike before 9 a.m. the following day, and a deduction was made for horses drawing a carriage returning within eight hours. The time was strictly watched, and the clock prevented disputes. The turnpike-men had various duties to perform in connection with the road service. They often had to provide chains, set up boundary-marks, place name-plates on the outskirts of villages, and water the roads, dust being a terrible plague in the coaching days. Some of the pumps for this purpose still exist, and I have been shown a speaking trumpet used in toll-houses. For deaf customers? Not at all. For broadcasting the news of a highway robbery!

The turnpike system rapidly spread until, the different Trusts linking, great stretches of road were brought into a decent condition. But the Trusts themselves had a stranglehold on the roads and the abuses were frightful. The companies often farmed out their tolls, which went to the highest bidder. The Trusts, which began to operate around 1711, had, by 1770, increased to such a number that hardly a main-road was free for traffic. Travelling thus became heavily taxed and there was a great outcry. The country people complained bitterly that turnpike roads increased the cost of living, as farmers had to pay to take their produce to market. One ticket rarely cleared more than one gate, and sometimes as much as five shillings was demanded for a carriage and two horses on a twelve-mile road. The hire of a pair of

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post-horses from London to Henley, in 1830, was two pounds, and the tolls amounted to twenty-five shillings, a total of sixty-five shillings, the equivalent of some ten pounds to-day. The 'berlin' or 'whisky' held two persons, which made the journey five pounds a head. The same journey made by motor-coach to-day is three shillings. No wonder that 'carriage-folk' were the moneyed classes, and few villagers ever got farther than the market town. As for walking, we shall see later when we encounter Pastor Moritz, a German clergyman who walked from London to Oxford in 1782, the outrageous treatment he received at the hands of innkeepers and others who had nothing but abuse for mere pedestrians.

Disturbances and protest meetings broke out all over the country against the extortions of the Turnpike Trusts. Soldiers had to be called out. Two men were hanged at Worcester, and one, after being hanged at Tyburn, threw back the coffin lid as it was being screwed down. The executioner wanted to tie him up again, but an indignant crowd rescued him, in vain, for the man vomited blood and died.

The Trusts often prevented new roads being made, in protection of their interests. A proposed road from New Windsor to Longford was opposed by the Maidenhead and Reading Turnpike, which complained that it would furnish a shorter route from London, and the traveller might be tempted to avoid Maidenhead. Corruption was rife. The turnpikes of England and Wales finally had to bear a charge of £2,000,000 for obtaining the Acts by which they were authorised and sustained in their rights !

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But the turnpikes grew, and by 1829 there were some 3,780 Acts of Parliament maintaining over a thousand miles of road. There were too many, indeed, and to the North from London there were ten toll-gates on three and a half miles of road. The system produced a crop of profiteers, of whom one, Lewis Levy, seems to have been the most notorious, and died a reputed millionaire. He was resolutely tackled by the pugnacious Cobbett, who, in the course of his rural rides, gained a wide acquaintance with turnpike roads and their charges. Levy levied tolls and farmed duties on post-horses, a tax imposed by the Government upon the running of these. Cobbett found a case in which an overcharge was made, and laid information against the collector. Cobbett and Levy appeared at Bow Street, and the battle began.

“ You are a Jew, I suppose ? ” baited Cobbett.

“ I am a Jew, it is true ; but you are neither Jew, Christian, nor any other religion. You are an atheist, as everybody knows ! ”

“ Jew dog ! ” retorted the truculent Cobbett.

Three years later Cobbett attacked Levy again. The toll collectors were often abusive. Cobbett summoned one at the Queen’s Elm Turnpike, Chelsea, for scurrilous language, and won his case.

The turnpike was doomed on the advent of the railway. By 1850 the coach traffic had ceased on the roads. Coachowners went into bankruptcy, killed by rail competition. The coaching inns and villages were wholly ruined, and the doom of the horse was in sight. The first stage out of London, through Hounslow on the Bath Road, had required 2,500 horses. These

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were sold at gift prices. Ostlers and barmaids were turned off :

*E'en Bessy's self, so long the bar's fair boast,
The cookmaid's envy, and the bagman's toast,
Whose winning smile was so well known to fame
That for a ray each traveller duly came,
E'en she—so hopeless, Hounslow, is thy case—
Hath packed her traps, and bolted from the place.*

Carriage-folk went by train, cattle went by train, goods went by train. The road was dead, and the Turnpike Trusts were in a parlous state. Public opinion had long been active against them, and they were being steadily dispossessed. The railways gave them the knock-out blow. The road was to lie dormant until the invention of the ' safety ' bicycle, when men ventured forth again. The motor-car has now brought back the tide of traffic and prosperity.

Some of our roads were created for the needs of wealthy individuals who promoted trusts for their own main benefit. Some created roads entirely for their own benefit. Above me, at Turville Park, where the French General Dumouriez ended his days, lived the Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst. He had a close friend in Disraeli, who lived in his country manor at Hughenden, beyond High Wycombe. By converting a bridle path that ran down a valley towards Fingest into a road, he saved himself a detour of two miles every time he went to and from his friend's house. Disraeli had attached himself early in his political career to Lord Lyndhurst, a restless and dis-

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credited intriguer, and the association ripened into a friendship that suggested the shortening of the road between them. When I now journey along that road, as often I do, on jaunts to High Wycombe, I am grateful to Lord Lyndhurst, for his road leads down through a valley that offers a superb vista and a scene of almost Tyrolean beauty.

There is another road near me that owes its creation to a wealthy landowner's requirement. For a long time I was much puzzled by a milestone, on my road from Henley to Marlow, which said 'To Hatfield 42 miles.' Now who should want to go to Hatfield, in Hertfordshire, right across the Chilterns, from Henley? It was a very old milestone, and experience has taught me that there is usually some reason behind caprice. Clearly someone wanted to get from Hatfield to the Great West Road. Who was this, and why? In 1766 a Turnpike Trust was created to make a turnpike from Reading to Hatfield. The trustees behind this act knew that the offer to serve Amersham, High Wycombe, Marlow, Henley, and Reading would meet with popular support. They therefore sent a turnpike zigzagging round by Henley and Marlow to Hatfield, making a ludicrous detour to catch the traffic between these places. It took over a more direct route in which a great landowner had a particular interest; namely, a road which continued from Marlow straight on to the Great West Road at Knowle Hill.

But for two gouty noblemen this road would not have existed. In the eighteenth century the great Marquess of Salisbury and the Earl of Essex, his

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neighbour, made yearly excursions to Bath to take the cure. The cross-country journey was so bad that they were compelled to go via London. The journey to London, the jolting caused by the cobbled streets of the crowded metropolis, severely aggravated their gout. So the two rich lords promoted a Turnpike Trust for a road from Hatfield to Reading, and thus attained their own desire with a branch road in almost a straight line through Marlow to the Great West Road, joining it at Knowle Hill.

II

But I am getting off the road. Having passed the Bix toll-gate, the old Oxford road struck left towards Nettlebed, but we shall continue straight on along the newer road through Nettlebed Wood. I say continue, but it is more probable that others like myself will come to a halt half-way down that superb avenue of beeches. I happened to be motoring through it, as I had done a hundred times, when the glory of a sunny November morning made me halt the car and get out. I had seen on an ordnance map the name 'Catsliffe,' and to Catsliffe I went. There had been a frost overnight. The sky was cloudless, the beechwoods and the undergrowth blazed with gold and copper, while the old tiles of the cottages reflected the blue of heaven on their rosy faces. Someone, on the edge of ground commanding a fine view, was building a large house, and I met a small boy with ruddy cheeks carrying a dozen packets of cigarettes to the bricklayers. Yes, this was Catsliffe, and there lay Crocker End, and Ting Tong Gate.

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It would be nice to live at Ting Tong Gate, I thought, even nicer than Catslipe. The Common, overgrown with bramble and the cherry-trees whose spring blossom is like fallen snow, stretched towards Nettlebed, where I was ultimately bound. Someone in the course of amateur theatricals in the Village Hall the previous night had whispered that they had been making bricks at Nettlebed for eight hundred years.

Now my mind had been turning brickwards ever since I had seen Miss Whissitt's Italian garden, but of this more anon. So here I was Nettlebed-bound, and led slightly astray by the name Catslipe and the glory of the November morning. Some village children stoking up fires in the brushwood reminded me that last night they had celebrated with bonfires the Fifth of November. None of them knew why they lived at Catslipe. No, nothing went 'ting-tong' at Ting Tong Gate, but one could get that way to Soundess and Nell Gwynne's Bower.

I suppressed my immediate excitement. I was going to Nettlebed to enquire about bricks. I must not go to Soundess to enquire about Nell Gwynne. That gay lady seems to have been very active in my neighbourhood, rivalling Queen Elizabeth in the number of beds she slept in, possibly not alone.

I walked on in the golden morning, determined not to drop bricks for courtesans. Someone had mown part of the Common in front of a house squatting by a dark screen of pines, dramatic against the azure sky. The owner, who had obviously mown the greensward of the Common, was now busy plugging the flint front wall with aubretia, to make even more lovely the

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footpath over the Common when spring came down this way. Could that be the broad back of Mrs. Pyne, bent at a diminishing angle over her task? It was the hour when errand-boys arrive at tradesmen's entrances, so I had almost passed unseen. But my way to the Nettlebed brickyard, via Catsliffe and Ting Tong Gate, with Nell Gwynne's Bower resolutely spurned, was not to be unimpeded.

Of course we gossiped, like two robins gaily alive in the crisp sunny air, and I picked up a few seeds of information. That place up there? Oh, the famous Nettlebed windmill had once stood there, and now stored water for the village. It had survived until a few years ago, when it had been burned down. Seven counties, Windsor Castle, and perhaps the Isle of Wight, could be seen from that hill. For a time the rebuilding of the windmill had been debated, but utility had triumphed over tradition, and the water-tank now lifts its unlovely head where proud sails once turned.

The Nettlebed windmill was actually the Watlington windmill. It had been bought second-hand in 1826! "On Friday last the extraordinary circumstance of moving a windmill, bodily, with the exception of the stones and wings, was accomplished. With the assistance of a timber-carriage and 18 horses they had conveyed it to the very bank which surrounds Windmill Hill, when the axle-tree gave way, and it actually rolled on the bank, and was, with little assistance, pulled into the field intended to receive it." Thus runs a local chronicle.

The death of a windmill is a sad thing. Old houses,

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old barns, one by one they fall before the hurried generations that, impatient with oak, brick, and tile, build with steel, concrete, and corrugated iron. As I looked at the water-tank that has replaced the windmill I felt a little like that Duc de Vivonne who, when asked by King Louis of France if he remembered a windmill that used to stand in the grounds of Versailles, replied : " Yes, sire, the mill has gone, but the wind is still there." Louis did not take the hint apparently.

Nettlebed's water reservoir now exists on the site of the windmill. For centuries the village depended on other supplies, and, of course, ' the learned and ingenious ' Dr. Plot, to use his own favourite epithet, showed interest in the local waters during his tour in 1676. How little escaped him ! " In this parish there is a gift very remarkable, viz. a slow spring, which seems to sweat rather than run out of the earth, stopping where it rises. . . . The people call it ' Mother Hibblemeer,' from we know not what old witch in derision ; whereas, if they consider how serviceable it has been to them, being never known to fail in the driest summer, and that in a country so incapable of wells that there is but one to be found in the village, they ought to respect it as the nymph of the place." The precious spring was, later, walled round, and the witch or the nymph continued her favours, for in a guide-book of 1838 the spring " now flows with greater bounty, affording the inhabitants a never-failing supply of water."

After a sigh for the vanished windmill, I went into Nettlebed. I never enter this village hugging the

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Oxford road without thinking of another traveller who came here in the year 1782. He was Pastor Carl Philipp Moritz, a young Prussian of twenty-six. Before he undertook his tour in England he had attempted to become an actor and had visited Erfurt, Gotha, and Weimar, but had failed to obtain an engagement. He therefore turned to the Church and teaching, and was employed at a Gymnasium in Berlin. He must have been a young man of enterprising disposition. He was poor but curious, and in the summer of 1782, from May 31st to July 18th, a period of seven weeks, he made a tour of England, mostly on foot. It was a mode of travel that required considerable courage. The book he wrote afterwards records in sorrow, and never in anger, the outrageous treatment he received from innkeepers and their minions merely because he did not arrive on horseback or in a coach. It was an age when the hiker was akin to the footpad.

Innkeepers, catering for carriage-folk, looked with deep suspicion on this dusty, footsore young man who had the additional drawback of being a despised foreigner. He took his rebuffs with a philosophic spirit, and his singular good-nature and lively humour enabled him to derive some amusement from the rough usage to which he was submitted. He told the story of his travels in a book which he published in Germany, three years after his return. Nor was he cured by his experience, for four years after his visit to England he went to Italy, where he won the warm friendship of Goethe. Alas ! he was not born for happiness, being prone to melancholy, and he died after a short illness in 1793, at the age of thirty-seven.

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Moritz came to England, not to improve his knowledge of the language, for he spoke our tongue quite well, but to study English character in the English scene. Gibraltar was undergoing its long siege. Fox, Pitt, and Burke were dominating the House of Commons, America was growing up into a nation, and Hastings was already a pioneer in Bengal. It was an England turbulent, truculent, and apt to regard all strangers as 'damned foreigners.' But young Pastor Moritz was not dismayed. He walked from London to Oxford, and he was almost tossed to death in the basket of the stage-coach to Northampton.

This poor, obscure German pastor had a stout heart, and despite all the indignities he suffered, never a sharp word about us escapes him. He was ready to be pleased with trifles, he had a keen eye for scenery. "The English milestones give me much pleasure," he records, "and they certainly are a great convenience to travellers. They have often seemed to ease me of half the distance of a journey, merely by telling me how far I had already gone ; and by assuring me that I was on the right road." He complains, but without bitterness, of the treatment he received whenever he sought a night's lodging. "To what various, singular and unaccountable fatalities and adventures are not foot travellers exposed, in the land of carriages and horses !" he exclaims.

But let us make his acquaintance on an afternoon of June 1782. He has come from Slough, where he had an unpleasant experience with a footpad, and then from Maidenhead, "a place of little note ; for some mulled ale, which I desired them to make me, I was obliged

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to pay nine-pence," and had entered Henley in the late afternoon. He rested for a time on the bank of the Thames, and fell asleep. When he awoke the last rays of the sun were on the river. He entered the town, but the grand appearance of the inns frightened him. "It was too fine a place for me," he observed, after sad experience of a foot-traveller's reception. So he passed on, and one cannot help wondering whether in the narrow Bell Street he had to step aside for the carriage of Lady Ailesbury and General Conway, or of sprightly Mrs. Lybbe Powys driving towards her brother-in-law's at Fawley Rectory. And was it at the inns near my cottage that he met with such blunt refusals to take him in? "We have no beds; you can't stay here to-night!" Poor Pastor Moritz, footsore and hungry, was obliged to walk on to Nettlebed, another five miles, where he arrived in darkness, and found hospitality.

"Everything seemed to be alive in this little village; there was a party of militia soldiers who were dancing, singing, and making merry. Immediately on my entrance into the village the first house that I saw lying on my left was an inn, from which, as usual in England, a large beam extended across the street to the opposite house, from which hung dangling an astonishing large sign, with the name of the proprietor."

To Moritz's surprise his request for a bed was complied with, but they treated him as an inferior and set him down to eat with some soldiers and servants. "I now for the first time found myself in one of those kitchens which I had so often read of in Fielding's fine

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novels ; and which certainly give one, on the whole, a very accurate idea of English manners. The chimney in this kitchen, where they were roasting and boiling, seemed to be taken off from the rest of the room and enclosed by a wooden partition ; the rest of the apartment was made use of as a sitting and eating room. All round on the sides were shelves with pewter dishes and plates, and the ceiling was well stored with provisions of various kinds, such as sugar-loaves, black-puddings, hams, sausages, flitches of bacon, etc."

He was soon to be shown that the reception of carriage-folk was both hearty and polite, in contrast with his own, for, while he sat eating, a post-chaise drove up, and in a moment both the folding doors were thrown open " and the whole house set in motion in order to receive, with all due respect, these guests, who, no doubt, were supposed to be persons of consequence. The gentlemen alighted, however, only for a moment, and called for nothing but a couple of pots of beer ; and then drove away again. Notwithstanding, the people of the house behaved to them with all possible attention, for they came in a post-chaise."

Pastor Moritz observes all this without bitterness, just as we have observed in a crowded wayside inn the rush of the one gravy-bespattered waiter to the table where the owners of the Rolls-Royce outside have seated themselves. It is all a matter of horse-power or purse-power, it would seem. Moritz was a little surprised, poor young man, that though they certainly did not take him for a person of consequence,

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they gave him "a carpeted bedroom and a very good bed."

He awoke on a Sunday morning and dressed, it would seem, to some effect, for they showed him, not into the kitchen, but into the parlour, "a room that seemed allotted for strangers, on the ground floor. I was also now addressed by the respectful term *Sir*; whereas the evening before I had been called only *Master*."

Pastor Moritz was so pleased with Nettlebed that he decided to stay for the day and attend divine service. The innkeeper's family, Illing by name, were dressed in their Sabbath clothes. Mine host lent Moritz the family Prayer Book, in which were written all the children's births and names, also the date of the innkeeper's wedding. The service began at half-past nine.

"Directly opposite to our house, the boys of the village were all drawn up, as if they had been recruits, to be drilled; all well-looking, healthy lads, neat and decently dressed, and with their hair cut short and combed on the forehead, according to the English fashion. Their bosoms were open and the white frills of their shirts turned back on each side. They seemed to be drawn up here at the entrance of the village to await the arrival of the clergyman. . . . At length came the parson on horseback. The boys pulled off their hats, and all made him very low bows. He appeared to be a rather elderly man, and wore his own hair round and decently dressed, or rather curling naturally."

A touching sight this, to make a Tory heart swell with a sense of security. I like to picture those apple-

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cheeked English lads, with open bosoms and frilled white shirts, bowing to the parson on horseback. Let us follow Pastor Moritz and the boys down the High Street to the church. Our Prussian friend cannot forget this occasion. "The bell now rung in, and so I too, with a sort of secret proud sensation, as if I also had been an Englishman, went with my prayer-book under my arm, to church, along with the rest of the congregation; and when I got into the church the clerk very civilly seated me close to the pulpit."

The German Protestant pastor watched the proceedings with a professional though devout eye. It seemed to him that the English parson had plenty to do, since the greater part of the Liturgy, the sermon, the lessons, and the psalms were his part of the service. And Pastor Moritz's eye could not help falling, with a disapproving look, no doubt, on two young soldiers who were not conducting themselves properly. They had "probably been in London and seemed to wish to pass for philosophers and wits, for they did not join in the prayers of the Church."

We can see those two louts, decked in their uniforms, and anxious to show the village lads that they were fine fellows who had seen the world. But the young German now had his attention drawn by a stir at the reading-desk. The clerk was busy and preparing for something new and solemn. Musical instruments appeared, and the clerk said in a loud voice: "Let us sing, to the praise and glory of God, the forty-seventh psalm."

"I cannot well express how affecting and edifying it seemed to me," he records, "to hear the whole orderly,

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and decent congregation, in this small country church, joining together, with vocal and instrumental music, in the praise of their Maker. It was the more grateful, as having been performed, not by mercenary musicians, but by the peaceful and pious inhabitants of this sweet village. I can hardly figure to myself any offering more likely to be grateful to God. The congregation sang and prayed alternatively several times ; and the tunes of the psalms were particularly lively and cheerful, though at the same time sufficiently grave, and uncommonly interesting. I am a warm admirer of all sacred music, and I cannot but add that that of the Church of England is particularly calculated to raise the heart to devotion. I own it often affected me even to tears."

The sermon was " not particularly striking," but the language was " plain, convincing, and earnest " ; moreover, it lasted little more than half an hour, in an era when sermons of two hours' length were quite the vogue. Pastor Moritz did not find our clergyman of very prepossessing appearance, despite his natural curls. He was distant and reserved, and he returned the bows of the farmers with a very formal nod, which seemed ungracious. The farmers were dressed in fine good cloth and " were to be distinguished from the people of the town, not so much by their dress as by the greater simplicity and modesty of their behaviour."

The service was over. The clergyman rode off to his vicarage, the congregation dispersed. Pastor Moritz lingered behind, and found himself in the company of some soldiers who gave themselves airs and declared it was a very miserable church, whereupon the

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good man retorted "that no church could be miserable which contained orderly and good people." Having well snubbed these superior young louts, Moritz went off to look at the tombstones, having observed inside the church a marble monument to "a son of the celebrated Dr. Wallis," which ran: "That learning and good sense which rendered him fit for every public station induced him to choose a private life"—a very neat way of extracting distinction from obscurity. The monument is still there, but the church in which Moritz worshipped has been rebuilt.

The son of the celebrated Dr. Wallis married a Miss Elizabeth Taverner, and thereby possessed himself of Soundess, a neighbouring estate. He died, aged sixty-six, in 1717, having "settled his three children well before he died." The sentence is somewhat ambiguous and ominous in its meaning. But let us follow Pastor Moritz outside into the churchyard. The tombstone whose epitaph so pleased his fancy that he copied it still exists. It is on the grave of one Strange, of a family of local shoeing-smiths and horse doctors.

*My sledge and anvil lie declin'd,
My bellows too have lost their wind ;
My fire's extinct, my forge decay'd,
My coals are spent, my iron's gone,
My nails are drove ; my work is done.*

Nettlebed so fascinated Pastor Moritz, both by its high and beautiful situation, and the geniality of its inhabitants, that he could not leave it at once. He stayed to dinner and went again to church in the after-

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noon. There was no service, but the young people sang a few psalms.

“ This was conducted with so much decorum that I could hardly help considering it as actually a kind of church-service. I staid, with great pleasure, till this meeting was over. I seemed, indeed, to be enchanted, as if I could not leave the village. Three times did I get off, in order to go on farther, and as often returned, more than half resolved to spend a week, or more, in my favourite Nettlebed.”

But he had much of England still to see in his short time, and he reluctantly set forth, casting back “ many a longing, lingering look on the little church steeple, and those hospitable, friendly roofs, where, all that morning, I had found myself so perfectly at home.” So he started off at three in the afternoon, hoping to reach Oxford, some eighteen miles away, on the following day. “ The road from Nettlebed seemed to me but one long, fine gravel walk in a neat garden. And my pace in it was varied, like that of one walking in a garden : I sometimes walked quick, then slow, and then sat down and read Milton.”

And so, reading Milton on the roadside out of Nettlebed, we will leave this pleasant young German on a June day of 1782.

III

Nettlebed may well be proud of this complimentary report and tribute to its inhabitants. Their treatment of a foreigner contrasts creditably with the appalling rudeness he had already suffered on the road, and the shocking inhumanity he met with later that evening at

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Nuneham, where *The Harcourt Arms* refused to give him a bed, or anything to eat. In vain he begged to be allowed to sleep on a bench. "Even in the moment that I was humbly soliciting this humble boon, they banged the door full in my face."

What was the inn at Nettlebed that treated young Moritz in better fashion and gave him so warm an affection for the village? He spoke of an inn immediately on the left as he entered the village from Bix. Was there an inn on the left? Thinking of Moritz on this bright November morn, I suspended my quest of the brickyard to look for an inn answering to that location. And there it was, not the more ostentatious *Stag's Head*, but the quiet, snuggled-down *Bull Inn*. Yes, there was the draw-in for the coaches, the yard beyond, and the stables. Excited by my discovery, I entered the little bar. This old inn has not changed greatly, I think. There is still a bow-window commanding the street and the traffic either way. Oak-beamed, with floors at different levels, with a coach-house, a saddler's room, and ostler's quarters over the stables, two hundred years have wrought little change.

But the race of innkeepers has changed. Mine host was an agreeable young man in a polo sweater, with a pretty little wife, both of them just moved in and feeling very strange among barrels and taps. Bewilderment spread over his face when a brewer's drayman informed him that he must keep the token 'chips' for the Excise. He had thrown one away that morning. His voice belonged more to a West End club than to a taproom. But all over England to-day bright young people are running staid old inns with success, and with taste when

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they avoid too much oak and pewter and 'olde-worlde' decoration.

My cheerful host willingly took me all over his house. He had not heard of Pastor Moritz, but I am sure it would not have surprised him if I had said Nell Gwynne had slept there. It would not have surprised Nell Gwynne, for it is undoubtedly Elizabethan, and was there when she came to Soundess. She might have slipped down there of a night for a little congenial company in the bar parlour.

We proceeded upstairs, and there, on a landing half-way up, I stopped dead. Before me were the effigies of two blackamoors, carved in wood and gaudily painted. Now one sees these blackamoor figures not infrequently in old furniture shops. They are generally dowdy and hideous, and one feels they have come out of Victorian drawing-rooms where they once lurked in a bower of palm-trees and plush curtains. But these twin blackamoors commanding that back staircase were unsullied by time. Their raiment sparkled, their coal-black faces glowed. They seemed to have just emerged from whatever strange workshop produced them in that Hogarthian era of blackamoors. They differed in another respect from all the other lugubrious effigies I had ever seen. Not only were they bright in raiment, unspotted and unchipped ; they carried rich pennants.

I had scarcely recovered from the shock of this encounter on the staircase when my glance fell on the bases of the figures. What I saw there took my breath. They bore heraldic shields, and I recognised at once their singular arms, surmounted by a small gilt cornet-

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shaped hat. It was the *corno d'oro*, the gold hat worn by a Doge of Venice, the symbol of his great and ancient office. The arms on the shield were those of the Grimani family, which I had often seen on the façade of the Palazzo Grimani in Venice. These blackamoors now standing on this old staircase in a Nettlebed inn had been the property of Doge Grimani, who had reigned over the great Venetian Republic in 1745-1752! Forgetting Pastor Moritz in the excitement of this singular discovery, I asked how these figures came to be there, so bizarre, so out of place on that small landing. Mine host did not know. They had been taken over with the house.

The journey of those two blackamoors across the centuries from Venice to Nettlebed promotes endless speculation. Their shining black faces, their brilliant costumes, their regal escutcheons, haunted me that night. I saw them standing at the head of a ducal staircase when five hundred Senators and their wives, in scarlet cloaks, and black dominos under tricorne hats, swept up that vast ballroom whose windows overlook the glittering Venetian lagoon. I saw them in the great Grimani Palace, by the water-gate, where they dimly grinned in the light of the moonlit Grand Canal. They haunted me, and in the morning I felt I must rescue them, whatever their history. I did not want two blackamoors, I had no idea where I could put them. They had been the property of a great Doge and they could not be left to moulder on the staircase of an old inn.

My readers must pardon the digression. The blackamoors of a Doge are not met with every day. If I had found Queen Elizabeth's stomacher, or Raleigh's

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cloak, I could not have been more astonished. I should have been less astonished, for the setting was English and Elizabethan. One hundred and fifty years ago a Prussian pastor had come to Nettlebed, and interest in his adventure had brought me up the staircase of the *Bull Inn*. How long was it since these blackamoors had journeyed from Venice? Had they been here in Moritz's day, had he encountered them on the staircase going up to his room with 'a bed and a carpet'? It was possible. . . .

But before our heads reel, let us turn from blackamoors to bricks. All around Nettlebed there are disused claypits, though the brickmaking industry is still alive there. When a charming young-old lady, who, in the year she became a great-grandmother, shot three 'Royals' on her Scottish moor, had whispered in my ear that bricks had been made at Nettlebed for eight hundred years, my attention was upon a bright group of local beauties acting Wheatley's 'London Cries' for a local charity. Miss Who'll Buy My Lavender and Miss Cherry Ripe, with half a dozen of the county's belles, were at that moment performing on the stage of Nettlebed's Memorial Hall, packed with local gentry and village folk. As I had been thrust in the front row, it was clearly no time or place for me to pursue an enquiry into local brickmaking, although I did glean that the Hall itself, as fine a village hall as I have ever seen, was built of local brick, and was the gift of my companion's late husband. Any further information was lost in the avalanche of applause from the lads at the far end that swept over Miss Cherry Ripe.

Eight hundred years had seemed a long time, but

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the estimate was modest when compared with the Roman tradition. After all, the Romans had built a town at Dorchester, and villas at Hambleden, both near to Nettlebed, and they must have obtained bricks somewhere. After the Roman period bricks were not in general use until the fourteenth century, when they began to be made in all sizes.

When one comes to think of it, a brick has a pedigree that makes our oldest families look like parvenus. The brick gives us the span of civilisation. It is no use suggesting that this began with the wearing of clothes ; crudity and nudity do not necessarily go together. The brick is a much safer measure of progress. It was certainly manufactured twelve thousand years ago, if Old Testament records are to be believed. The Tower of Babel was a brick building. They have found brick tablets at Ur of the Chaldees, which proves that Abraham did a little building many thousand years ago, and I have handled a brick from the Sumerian palace at Kish, built three thousand five hundred years ago. The walls of Babylon were made of burned brick, thirteen inches square and three inches thick. The Egyptians were great brickmakers—they built a brick pyramid at Sakḳara. They did not bake their bricks, and I have always been curious to know why it was thought unreasonable of them to ask the Israelites to make bricks without straw. The Chinese, too, made bricks—they built the Great Wall with them about 214 B.C., surely the most stupendous brickbuilding operation in history, for it is fifteen hundred miles long, with an average height of twenty feet and a roadway on the top fifteen feet wide.

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When the Roman Empire fell, Europe lost the art of brickmaking. They made bricks in England until the end of the fourth century, but the manufacture ceased with the end of the Roman occupation, and there seems to have been no more brickmaking until the Flemings came over to England in the fourteenth century. They settled in East Anglia, but they were in demand everywhere.

When looking through some papers lent to me by Lord Camoys, out of the library at Stonor House, I came across an interesting link with the Nettlebed brickyard. His ancestor, Thomas de Stonor, was building in the early part of the fifteenth century, and was extending the property which is now the mansion at Stonor Park. The prosperous merchant is always tempted to build, and the Stonors were ever extending in these early years of their fortune from the wool trade. We find Sir William Stonor getting into debt in 1480 and being admonished by his prudent uncle. "And of certain things I would desire you and pray you in the name of God, that ye will not over-wish you, nor over-purchase you, nor over-build you, for these three things will pluck a young man right low." And then, very wisely, he added: "Nor meddle not with no great matters in the law. For I trust to God to see you the worshipfullest of the Stonors that ever I saw or shall see my days." His wish must have been fulfilled, but I am glad that Sir William Stonor felt inclined to build, for the house he enlarged graces the park in whose domain I often walk on a morning excursion from Pilgrim Cottage.

Sir William's grandfather was also a builder, with

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Nettlebed bricks according to the following receipt, sent to John Warefield, receiver of Thomas de Stonor, "for the year ending Michaelmas 1417: for £13 13s. 4d., received from the Lord *ad solvendum les Fleymings pro opera de Stonor.*" So the Flemish bricklayers had already arrived in England, and we definitely know where they were making their bricks, for there is another receipt showing that £40 was paid for the making of 200,000 'brykes,' and £15 was paid for carting them, from Crocker End to Stonor. On the last page of the account there is mention of the hire of a house at Crocker End "for Michael Fleyming who was occupied there making bricks." Now Crocker End is on the edge of Nettlebed, and when Michael the Fleming settled there around 1417 he was living near to his work and his clay-bed under Windmill Hill.

All this was in my mind when my companion was whispering about Nettlebed bricks. "Yes—yes," I said, applauding Miss Cherry Ripe and Lady Betty. "Yes, remarkable." And a side thought, struggling through bricks, and amateur theatricals, and consciousness of a very hard seat, was of the strange coincidence that I, who had discovered that very afternoon the information about Michael Fleyming in 1417, should now be learning more about brickmaking from a companion who had a grandson named Michael Fleming. But all further thoughts were checked by the fall of the curtain and the vicar's announcements.

The following morning, crossing to the Nettlebed brickyard, where a modern Fleming had revived the industry of the ancient Flemings, I wondered if they

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had been brickmaking when Pastor Moritz walked by. But it was unlikely he would see anything, for the poor man had arrived from Henley in the dark, and the following day, when he had been so delighted with Nettlebed, was a Sunday.

I walked into the office of the brickyard, on the edge of the Common, with its great bottle-shaped kiln girdled with an iron band. Across the way were the first houses of Nettlebed's High Street.

"Eight hundred years?" repeated the pleasant occupant of the office. "I don't know about that, but we're making bricks the Roman size, as you'll see."

He led me up the yard, and the colours of the bricks began to arouse the building mania. They were attractive colours, russet and coppery, sand-faced and with a slight bluey glaze. I picked up one of the thin bricks and felt I would like to build a garden wall. Was it childish of me? Perhaps it was, for children love playing with bricks. And standing there on that sunny November morning, with the Common ablaze with late autumn's glory, and the encircling beech-woods patterning the earth with gold, I remembered a floor on which I lay stretched over thirty years ago, and a great box of bricks with which I built houses, bridges, forts, and all the fairy castles of childhood. I remembered the breathless moment when I perched the last brick on the high tower, the dismay when the whole edifice crashed, the triumph when it did not topple. I remembered the concentration with which I removed the foundation brick by brick, waiting for the great moment when the whole building would fall in ruins. And I remembered so well the artful subterfuge by

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which I delayed bedtime. The bricks had to be packed in their box, and there was always one left over that necessitated a re-packing, a few more minutes. Finally, I slid the lid of the box on, a lid with a glorious picture of the Tower of London, a cheating suggestion that with the contents one could build a facsimile. They were wooden bricks, of course, with some ornamental bricks that . . .

"After the Romans they were irregular in size," said the voice, bringing me back across the years to Nettlebed Common. "Then in 1625 the Crown ordered them to be 9 by 4½ by 3 in.—which is what they are mostly to-day."

I learned a lot about bricks. They had once put a tax on them, and repealed it in 1839, when the size was again regulated. Then, somehow, I mentioned Pastor Moritz, the cause of my presence in Nettlebed that morning.

"Oh, yes—he stayed at the *Red Lion*."

"No, not the *Red Lion*—the *Bull*," I corrected.

My brickyard friend smiled.

"I've always understood it was the *Red Lion*—it had a sign right across the street. That's the house, on the corner of the village—it's no longer an inn. You see, the Oxford road, which used to come up in front of it and turn the corner, now goes straight on."

I stared. This was very shattering after my adventure in the *Bull*. Five minutes later I was across the road looking over a yard gate. A man in the yard saw me. I told him what I was trying to find out.

"Come in," he said, very hospitably, opening the gate. "I think this was the place. The Oxford road

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came up to the door there, which we've closed. They tethered their horses to that tree; you can see the staples still."

It was nearing lunch time, it was also washing-day. I hesitated. But my host insisted on my entering the house. Through a kitchen, with an appetising odour where a smiling wife was cooking, I walked into——

At first I thought it was a conservatory. The floor was crowded with flower-pots, and I looked over the heads of a forest of enormous chrysanthemums.

"I grow them for a hobby," explained my host. "This, you see, was the coaching entrance."

"The what?" I queried. Anything more unlike the entrance to a stable yard I could not imagine.

"Look at the ceiling—it's beamed, you see. The street entrance was over there, and you drove in straight through here, on through the present kitchen and out to the yard. Look at this!"

He opened what appeared to be a small cupboard, and I then saw that it was a side window where the ostler or the coachman had received his drink.

"Come upstairs," said my friendly guide.

We ascended a wide staircase and came on to a landing with numbered bedrooms. My doubts about this being Pastor Moritz's inn were dwindling. When at last I came downstairs and was shown the old front door and the large parlour on the left, I knew I had stepped into that kitchen where, in 1782, on a June night, he had sat down to eat with soldiers and servants. In that dim hall I could almost hear the post-chaise draw up and the gentlemen alighting from it calling for their pots of beer before journeying on into

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the dark night. And, amid all those chrysanthemums raising their coloured heads, I half-closed my eyes to conjure up the past, to see the red-coated soldiers, desperately recruited probably, for this was England's year of disaster, and her Empire seemed falling to pieces, with the revolution in America and Ireland, and the siege of Gibraltar by France and Spain. I heard the roast sizzling on the spit, smelt the air fuggy with smoking, beer, and tallow-candles. Outside the horses champed at their bits, and stamped on the cobbles. Master Illing, mine host, scurried around and kept an eye on pot-boy and serving-wench. The Illing children, going reluctantly to bed, cast a wondering glance on the dusty young foreigner who was asking for a night's rest. It was Saturday night and the yokels of the district were arguing in the taproom, in a haze of tobacco-smoke puffed out of churchwardens made from Shotover clay.

"I've more in the greenhouses," said the voice of the chrysanthemum grower, breaking in on my reverie. I started, gave a last look round at the parlour, and started again. Had my eyes deceived me? No, there on the wall were two coloured Venetian prints, of the eighteenth century. One showed the Grand Canal—the Palazzo Labia, and the bridge of the Cannaregio; the other, a festival in the courtyard of the Doge's Palace. They were beautiful prints.

The previous month I had leaned out of a window of that very Palazzo Labia, which provided its seventeenth-century owner, Labia, with a costly pun. Tradition says that he gave a great feast in his palace at which all the plates, dishes, and other utensils were

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of solid gold. During the dinner he threw several of them into the canal, boasting : “ *Le abbia, o non le abbia, sarò sempre Labia !* ”—“ Whether I have them or have them not, I shall still be *Labia !* ” Our modern profiteers cannot aspire to vulgarity of that order, which we need not lament.

I thought of this palace, now become a Fascist headquarters, as I looked at the coloured engravings on the walls of the ex-*Red Lion* at Nettlebed. A Doge’s black-amoores one hundred yards away, and Venetian prints here—who could have imagined such souvenirs of ancient Venice would lurk in a village of the English Chilterns ? But then who could have imagined, in Moritz’s time, that the coach entrance would become a chrysanthemum conservatory ?

It was time to go. I made an apologetic exit, expressing my thanks to the hospitable flower-grower and his busy wife. Outside, the glorious morning had vanished. It was grey and a drizzle was falling. I got into my car, and, acting on a whim, struck right across the Common, past Joyce Grove, where William III and Queen Anne had visited, in search of the old Oxford road. I found it and followed a wide, rough, leaf-strewn track.

Half a mile down it I saw a solitary figure trudging along in the rain. He seemed weary and travel-stained and pitiable. I looked at him cursorily, half-wondering if it might be the ghost of Pastor Moritz making for Nettlebed. But it was a tramp collecting firewood. I followed the dead road into Bix, and all the way along I raised other ghosts of the past on the King’s high road. One hundred years ago the *Red*

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Lion had been astir with the coming up this road of the Abingdon and Oxford coach *Defiance*, which left the *Catherine Wheel* in Henley every day at half-past one, and the Birmingham *Tantivy*, which left the *White Hart* at half-past five, and the Cheltenham *Magnet*, at half-past three. There were other coaches to Shrewsbury, Holyhead, and Liverpool. And now, a quarter of a mile away, on the new Oxford road, the coaches still run, petrol driven, to Oxford and Worcester, Cheltenham, and Cardiff, setting down at the *White Hart* in Henley.

There were more coaches then than now, for the old road resounded to the wheels and hoofs of coaches going to Wallingford and Gloucester and Stroud. Journeying to London had become fashionable, but Sunday travel was still frowned upon. There was a time, in 1584, when it was strictly forbidden to go to London on Sunday. "None of the inhabitants of the sayed town of Henley shall travayle, ryde or goe to the citie of London on the Sabothe day, except they be provided with passports . . . upon payne of forfeiture of two shillings." The following year six reckless fellows broke the law and were fined a shilling for "rydeing to London on the Sabothe day."

In 1800 coach traffic was at its height. By 1838 the shadow was falling. "When the Western Rail Road is open," said a Henley coaching time-table, "conveyances will be provided at the above office to convey passengers to the station every time the trains start." The station was to be at Twyford, on the Reading line, and two years later the railway was earning laurels.

I left the ghostly road at Bix, and when I had passed

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the toll-gate, where no one emerged, I wondered if a lantern had been flashed in Pastor Moritz's face that dark June night as he trudged to Nettlebed, and I recalled a more recent, half-comic, half-tragic pair, descended from that village shoeing-smith horse-doctor whose epitaph Moritz had read, who, through summer suns and winter rains, had been familiar on this road in Victorian days. They carried stout oak sticks and umbrellas, and pushed a perambulator in which they bore fruit and vegetables to a shop in Henley. Everyone knew them, as they knew Tarry the postman, with his twin leather satchels and his horn, on which he tooted to bring people to their gates. When these two old sisters inherited one hundred pounds from a deceased parent, they buried them in the garden, and they were no more seen about together, for one had to remain guarding the treasure while the other roamed abroad. Eventually they were persuaded to trust the savings bank, and the pair once more took the Oxford road, complete with oak sticks, umbrellas, and perambulator.

It was lunch time, it was drizzling, and the road was empty. I should be faced by an anxious housekeeper, for I had left the cottage only for a few minutes, and now it was past one o'clock. Then, as I began to go downhill, on that stretch of road that offers a magnificent grouping of wooded slopes, I saw a youth tramping along. He was hatless, and wore a cape under which the shape of a rucksack bulged. Over one shoulder he carried a cloth bag. He was ruddy, with corn-coloured hair. Sturdy brown legs protruded under his cape. All this told me at once the

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nature of the rain-drenched traveller. I stopped him, unable to resist a repetition of history.

“ *Guten Morgen—sind Sie Deutscher?* ” I asked.

“ *Ja!* ” came the smiling reply. The youth halted.

“ *Wie heissen Sie?* ” I asked.

“ *Carl!* ”

“ *Carl Moritz?* ”

“ *Nein, Carl Rein—warum?* ” laughed the youth.

“ I thought you might be a ghost,” I explained, and, seeing his bewildered young face, added : “ The ghost of Carl Moritz, who passed along here some hundred and fifty years ago. Where are you going ? ”

“ To Oxford. I am late for arrival at Nettlebed.” He laughed and passed a big hand over his wet brown hair. “ Please, who is Carl Moritz—a German boy also ? ”

“ That will take a lot of explaining. Have you had lunch ? ”

“ *Nein.* Here ! ” he said, tapping his jacket.

“ Then have some lunch with me—come in out of this rain,” I said, opening the door.

“ Please, that is very kind. I have the pleasure to accept.”

“ Where did you learn English ? ”

“ In school. I am student, but finished now. I am to become architect, but I now make *reise*—how you say ? ”

“ A tour.”

“ Thank you. Yes, a tour, to study, to see places and buildings. I am very excited for Oxford,” he said, “ then for Stratford-on-Avon.”

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His blue eyes shone with animation. The water still ran down his wet face and cape.

"You're having bad weather," I remarked.

"Oh, everything's most kind."

In getting in he had carefully shifted the bag on his shoulder.

"A mandolin?" I asked.

"*Ja!*" he cried, his face lighting up. "You know, everybody thinks it most strange I carry it. You like music?"

"Very much—after lunch you must play it."

"Oh—I am very poor, my voice is not nice."

His voice sounded very nice. I recalled those three *wandervogels* I had captured in Venice one day, and how they had sung like nightingales in a friend's garden.

He was hungry, I found, and full of the joy of life. He lived in Weimar and told me much about his two sisters and his father, who was a bank official. I soon found that Hitler was God, and said nothing to depose that deity. There was a mysticism in the lad's eyes whenever he named him. He was very interested in the story of Pastor Carl Moritz. He would like to sleep in the *Red Lion* at Nettlebed, "but it is urgent for me to know Oxford," he explained, "so I arrive to-night."

I felt very doubtful about that. Oxford was twenty miles away. I decided to motor him to Dorchester, ten miles on his route.

After lunch he sang to his mandolin, with complete composure. He had an excellent voice, and his repertoire was delightful, though somewhat melancholy.

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"Please, I thank you and will go. This is the first English home I have seen. It is a great pleasure for me. How glad it makes me for Carl Moritz," he said, smiling.

When I told him I would take him as far as Dorchester, he protested, but I saw he was relieved. It was still raining. He knew no one in Oxford. He was going to Stratford and back on four pounds. He signed my visitor's book with a Gothic flourish, and regretted the light was too bad to take my photograph, producing, as usual, an elaborate German camera with a battery of lenses. He would write to me, and I would tell him what mistakes he made, yes? I smiled at this profitable gesture of friendship and utility.

My housekeeper was a little startled when he clicked his heels and shook her solemnly by the hand.

"I thank you for much beautiful food," he said, with a disarming display of white teeth. The mandolin went into the bag. He pulled on the stockings which had been dried for him, rolling them under his strong knees. He picked up his heavy rucksack like a feather and clattered out on his great nailed boots. Then with a gesture I see still, he made me a little bow and said, before entering the car :

"Pastor Carl Moritz says good-bye to Pilgrim Cottage with a sadness."

I have corrected four letters from Carl Rein since that day. One cannot be churlish to Pastor Carl Moritz.

WHEN SYLVIA WALKS

*Silver is the laughter of Sylvia,
Gold is the smile of her face,
And a pool is not clear as the eyes of her,
Nor the fawn has an equal grace.*

*The poorest of those who come nigh her
Feel they are rich to behold
Such a treasure as never a buyer
Bought with a mountain of gold.*

*It's summer, with sunshine around her
Wherever she turns in her glance,
With the poorest wonderfully crowned there,
Proud as the kings of old France.*

CHAPTER III

SHEER WHISSITTRY

I

ONLY a few years ago the thought of having to live in the country would have filled me with despair. It would still fill me with despair were it not that there is no compulsion attached to the question of where I have to live. So I now prefer the country to the town. I go frequently to London, and keep a *pied-à-terre* there in order to feed the nostalgia that hurries me back to Pilgrim Cottage. We are perverse creatures, and rarely does the pleasure in doing a thing grow with the capacity to do it. Most successful writers, for instance, detest writing. A good number of them live in the country, not in order to be quiet for their work, but because living in the country enables them to find a hundred excuses, a hundred odd jobs, for deferring the labour of the pen.

I marvel, therefore, when my friend and neighbour, Miss Whissitt, alludes to her two great passions in life. She longs for a flat in London, and to be a famous author. The manner by which she augments my reputation into an earth-encompassing renown is really an indication of her own private passion. She gloats over the size of my mail, and curious, pleasant or unpleasant details of it which I sometimes reveal in pity

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for her thirsty curiosity. She projects herself into my situation and occupies an imaginary throne, reigning as a Marie Corelli, George Sand, or Ouida, coy in the limelight that beats on her garden at Filldyke Cottage, Bix Bottom. No one ever makes holes in her hedge, or peers over the top, or pops up through the sliding roof of a car, or hangs about until the postman opens the gate, or boldly bangs the knocker, explaining that he knows someone who knows someone who once played whist with the occupant of Filldyke Cottage. Alas! unbroken seclusion surrounds Filldyke Cottage, in remote Bix Bottom, and Miss Whissitt is left undisturbed in the creation of her masterpiece.

It is a little unkind of me to poke fun at Miss Whissitt. She is a darling, despite her frightful hats and her passion for a French idiom. But she seems thrilled by things that annoy me, and the most trivial incidents of an author's life are transmuted by her into immortal events. But I am always glad to see her. She is one of the most intelligent women I have ever met. And if she does not know a thing she says so frankly. She is safe. She was having tea with me in the garden on the day that a New Zealand reader had sent me a strange plant.

"Have you ever heard of a manuka tree?" I asked.

"*Mais certainement.* It grows freely in New Zealand. Why do you ask?"

I swallowed a piece of cake quickly. Amazing woman! I really thought I had caught her this time. For three years now I have tested her encyclopædic mind, and never once has it faltered.

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"A reader in New Zealand has sent me a manuka tree. Another reader in Australia has sent me some acacia seeds gathered from the grave of Adam Lindsay Gordon, and another in South Africa has sent me seeds of some Namaqualand daisies. All these arrived this morning. I'm thinking that if I'm to respond to all this kind attention I shall have to take a few acres and start a Colonial Garden—I have about sixty exhibits already."

"What an excellent idea!—I wonder someone hasn't done that!" exclaimed Miss Whissitt.

"Done what?" I asked, a little absently, my attention attracted by the rapid shaking of the ivy and clematis that form a porch over my garden gate.

"Made a British Empire Garden."

"I should hate a political garden," I said. "You'd have to start a Seed Reform League and run a campaign to stop all foreign imports. No, horticulturally speaking, I'm all for the League of Nations. But I want to ask you about the manuka tree from New Zealand. What sort of a tree is it, and how do you know what it's like?"

"There's one at Kew Gardens, and it won a prize against entries from all over the world. The crimson one's the nicest——"

"Mine is a pink one—and the Customs Department has certified it's healthy and has given it naturalisation papers," I interjected, recalling the letter that accompanied the plant.

"The pink one is quite nice," continued Miss Whissitt, lighting a cigarette, quite unaware that I

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always wonder at her smoking—how does she reconcile it with her strong dislike of lipstick and short skirts?

“But what is it exactly—a shrub or a tree?” I asked.

“It’s often called a tea-tree, but it’s a shrub. It’s hardy and it likes a heavy soil. It grows slowly and should not be pruned. Plant it in a sunny open space. The flower is beautiful and also its shape. It flowers almost all the year round, though most profusely in the autumn.”

“You sound like a spring catalogue—how do you know all this about a New Zealander?” I asked in wonder, accustomed though I am to Miss Whissitt’s astonishing garden lore.

She gave a wan smile, puffed, and said quietly:

“When I was a companion in New Zealand, we had——”

“What!” I exclaimed, startled at the information that Miss Whissitt had ever been in New Zealand.

“*C’est incroyable, n’est-ce pas?*” said Miss Whissitt, with a faint smile. “I went to New Zealand ten years ago as companion to a lady. There were manukas in the garden at Te Pukee.”

“It sounds like a line for a crooner—‘There were manukas in the garden at Te Pukee’.”

“They are quite lovely shrubs, and I can’t think why we don’t grow them here,” went on Miss Whissitt, ignoring my facetiousness. “Who was Adam Lindsay Gordon, and why should they send you seeds from his grave—was he a relation?”

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I jumped in my chair. Was it possible that Miss Whissitt could not know?

"You must have heard of Adam Lindsay Gordon—Australia's greatest poet!" I protested.

"No, never—don't think it's awful of me, but I detest poetry. What did he write? Something about death, I'm quite sure. They're all certain they're going to die young, and they don't. They go on annoying people for years, living on relations, drawing pensions, or imposing on silly women."

"Come, come, this really won't do," I retorted, amazed at my friend. "Didn't Keats and Shelley and Rupert Brooke die young?"

"But Browning and Tennyson and Wordsworth went on drooling for a fearful long time," replied Miss Whissitt, spiritedly. "And they do spoil the landscape. There's the dreadful Imperialism of 'some corner of a foreign field that is forever England'—as if we hadn't planted the flag in enough places, and there's Tennyson's idiotic brook, babbling on for ever, or his innumerable bees buzzing around his immemorial elms—and what are immemorial elms, can you tell me? And you can't look at Tintern Abbey without intimations of Wordsworth's idea of immortality. Have you ever thought what nonsense that line is—'Trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home'? If you had had training as a nurse as I have, you'd be revolted by that gynecological conception of the Almighty."

"Aren't you missing the spirit of the thing?" I interposed, almost overwhelmed by Miss Whissitt's fervid outburst.

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“ And their conceit about themselves !—so sure of their immortality and their importance,” went on Miss Whissitt, heatedly. “ ‘ Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.’ That was Shelley’s conception of himself, and he was in a muddle with money or matrimony all his life ! No one ever seems to contradict them. They’re like newspapers, they go on printing testimonials to themselves. I’m sorry, I’m forgetting, you write poetry.”

“ Don’t spare me or my verses,” I replied, smiling. This sudden squall had revealed a new Miss Whissitt. “ I never knew you had been to New Zealand,” I said, changing the subject.

“ Yes—it was dreadful ! ”

“ New Zealand ? ”

“ Oh, no. New Zealand’s lovely ! No, I mean the companion business. I went with a woman who suffered from indigestion. I can hardly talk about it now. That woman lived for her symptoms. She enjoyed bad health without a break. As soon as you mentioned the word ‘ manuka,’ I saw a large medicine bottle with a brown sediment. She shook that bottle all over New Zealand. I’m afraid I sound very disagreeable this afternoon. There were faults on both sides. You see, all my life I’ve wanted to go to Italy—the sun, the colour, the pictures, the architecture, the history—I’ve read anything about Italy I can put my hands on. I’ve wanted to go there for years and years. And when I got there at last it was during the War, in the winter, when I went as a nurse with the British Army. Then, just as the spring was beginning to come, and I thought I should see the sun and flowers,

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and get down from the cold mountains into the plain, we were sent home. I'd cried at nothing before, nothing among the horrors I'd seen, but I did cry then, in sheer misery and frustration. Now I know I shall never go—unless it's as a companion to someone with indigestion—and at my age I couldn't face that. *Jamais ! Jamais !* When people see my Italian garden I feel quite ashamed to confess it's all a work of imagination."

Miss Whissitt sighed, and threw away her cigarette end. Then, her instinct for tidiness triumphing, she got up, collected the stub, and dowsed it in her teacup.

"I never knew you had an Italian garden," I said, again astonished by Miss Whissitt. I had been four or five times to Filldyke Cottage, and admired her garden set up on a slope above Bix Bottom.

"You know Italy so well that I didn't dare to show it to you—you'd think it quite ridiculous."

"I'm sure I shouldn't. Please let me see it!" I urged.

"Very well, if you won't laugh at it."

"Of course I shan't," I vowed. "I'm quite sure it's a lovely garden. Have you a pergola?"

Miss Whissitt picked up her gloves and rose to leave.

"Wait and see!" she said, and then, with a delightfully audacious air, added, "*Vuòle venire da me domani alle quattro, per prendere il tè?*"

Once more I was dumbfounded. Her Italian was perfect.

"Yes, thank you. To-morrow at four, for tea," I repeated, as I followed her to the gate.

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II

I have sowed the seeds of the Namaqualand daisies, and I hope they come up, both for their own beauty and the wish in an old lady's letter that accompanied them. "About five years ago I visited England for the first time and felt as if I belonged there, and one day, not very far distant, I hope to retire and live in England. I wonder if you would allow me to come and see you and your cottage? If these seeds grow and flower, I hope sometimes, when you look at them, you'll think kindly of your South African reader."

And that's why it's so hard to close the garden gate, even when the tenth visitor has rung the bell and shattered my day's work. I hope when the South African visitor comes home the Namaqualand daisies will be ablaze, as they are in the veldt she knows; their name is a fanfaronade itself, and I have given them a South African corner of their own.

Just as I had sowed the daisy seeds, and written out the label, there was a rumble, a squeak, and a slam outside the gate. I know well the sound of that tinny door on the Poultenay Morvyn-Morpeth car. A few minutes later the Brigadier-General appeared, followed by his sister, in yellow wash-leather gloves. They carried flower-pots and were highly agitated.

"Brought you some dahlias—know anything about dahlias?" demanded the P.M.

"Nothing at all," I declared, at once.

"Perhaps you don't like them?" asked Miss Amelia Morvyn-Morpeth.

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"I receive anything with gratitude—and you've never brought me a poor thing yet," I said, gratefully.

Since the crisis over the cinema in Henley we have been firm friends. The rather ugly Georgian house that was threatened with an Elizabethan face and a car-park posterior has been 'saved' for Heaven knows what. The A.M. and the P.M. insist on regarding me as The Press, which made a 'powerful protest.' It is quite useless for me to deny playing any part in directing local events. "We know!" rumbles the P.M. And what was I to say when a delightful footstool of petit-point arrived with the A.M.'s card attached, bearing the words 'In Gratitude'? Miss Amelia's fingers must have put in many hours' work on that tribute to my advocacy. Any further denial was useless. "Nothing at all? Nothing at all? But the place's saved!" exclaimed the P.M.; then, with a sly look: "Nothing at all! Ha! Ha! We know!" But since uneasy lies the foot that wants a footstool, I am grateful every time my shoe rests on the A.M.'s cornucopia overflowing with worsted flowers.

The A.M. and the P.M. dumped the pots.

"All tabbed, you see—put 'em in any time now," said the P.M., raising his head and looking at the sky as if to make sure no cyclone or blizzard would break on us.

"We've awful news for you," announced the A.M., taking off a glove in order to extract a handkerchief. Then, after solemnly blowing her nose, "Awful, Poultenay, isn't it?" she asked, looking at her brother dolefully.

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The P.M. blew out his white moustache, in the manner he must have blown it when giving the order to charge—his battles were in the pre-digging days.

“Damn crazy—couldn’t believe my ears!” he grunted.

I, too, can never believe his ears. They have enormous lobes, fat and pink, that run straight into the cheeks without a scallop. And why doesn’t the A.M. take the scissors and trim their whiskers? It is the sisterly act one expects in old age.

“What is it?” I asked, a little indifferently, picking up one of the dahlia pots and scanning the label.

“They’re going to cut a new main road from Nettlebed to Henley, and——”

“Not a new one—it’s the old road they’re going to bring into use,” interrupted the A.M. agitatedly.

“Yes—make the road past your gate the main road again,” said the P.M. “Ever hear such a thing?”

I nearly dropped the flower-pot. My heart stood still. The road past my gate had been used by the Romans, the Saxons, the Danes, the Tudors, the Elizabethans. Chaucer, and Shakespeare—coming and going from his parents’ house in Henley Street, Stratford-on-Avon—Charles I, Hampden, Prince Rupert, Cromwell, Marlborough, Wellington, Blücher, the Allied Princes, Dr. Johnson and Boswell, Goldsmith, Garrick, Washington Irving, Benjamin Franklin, Gladstone, a host of famous men, from the days when the first soldiers of the Roman Legion had marched to their camp at Dorocina, had passed down

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this now quiet lane by my gate. Some eighty years ago they had cut the new road up the steep hill to the Nettlebed plateau. In the distance I can hear the whine of cars racing up and down that Oxford road while my own lane, still and grass-grown, forgets the traffic of centuries. And now they proposed opening up the old road, and bringing the twentieth century roaring in my ears. It meant the end of Pilgrim Cottage so far as I was concerned. With luck I might sell it for a road-house, or some desperate 'genteel' person might spin her spinsterly web and catch the tea-drinkers and buyers of home-made cakes from an old-world garden.

"It's unbelievable!" I exclaimed at last, recovering breath.

But much that was unbelievable had to be believed, as I had discovered after three years' sojourn at my cottage. There was the Fairmile comedy of errors. The Fairmile, once happily named, is a noble avenue, flanked on either side by elms, which runs for a straight mile out of Henley on the Oxford road. On each side of the narrow road there are thirty feet of greensward. The vista is superb, looking west, with a scenic background of hills, counterpaned with multicoloured fields, cross-stitched with hedgerows, and overlined darkly with trees. At the very end of the Fairmile, where the road forks, two Lombardy poplars raise their plumes to heaven, keepers of the gateway to upland splendour.

Next to the road itself there is a footpath. It was not made to encourage courting couples even in Georgian days, for two cannot walk abreast; and to-day, at

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an elbow's space, the world whisks by at sixty miles an hour. No road could be better for motor traffic. It is straight and has perfect visibility, provided the footpath were shifted from its dangerous proximity and placed somewhere along the greensward so admirably adaptable to that purpose. But no, the footpath cannot be moved. So the road is lit. Twenty lamp standards throw twenty intermittent pools of light on a black road, to the bewilderment of road users. An outcry results in cowls and blinkers being fitted to the standards, so that there are twenty illuminated brackets interrogating the darkness, making the light-pools more dazzling, the darkness darker. And still the pedestrian, on the opposite side, must walk in darkness, elbowing swift death. Ah! the solution—a thirty m.p.h. speed limit. So a sign is erected, with a murderous tin sheet on a level with the pedestrian's head. We collide with it in the darkness. Four times it falls down, four times it is solemnly erected. The local residents and the police agree to ignore the limit. Then, after three months of maligned existence, it disappears for ever. But the comedy is not yet over. One day I open the *Henley Standard*, the faithful reporter of local wonders, and under the startling heading *Henley Town Council. Mortuary Problem Solved. Good-bye to Mr. Councillor Pippin*, I read that the Fairmile lights are to be suspended over the middle of the road! Is the mortuary problem solved? I wonder.

“Unbelievable? That Fairmile, my dear sir!” ejaculated the P.M. “I wish you'd write a strong letter to the authorities—you know—with the Press behind you——”

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"I've come here for a quiet life," I protested, "not to conduct a campaign with local authorities—if they are local, for if you complain to the Borough Council they refer you to the County, and the County refers you to the U.D.C., and all, in the last resort, will refer you to the Local Government Board, or the Ministry of Transport. I prefer to suffer in silence, and when it becomes unbearable to steal away. I've known men to be ruined in the attempt to procure rural bliss. They buy surrounding fields at preposterous prices to keep themselves private, they see the village green invaded with a petrol-pump, the local bad hill becomes a joy-ride for hooligans on motor-cycles, the village shop breaks out in an eczema of trade-signs, and finally the empty mansion in the park is converted into an asylum and your morning walks entangle you in the unhappy creatures you know you will soon join. No—never attempt to stay the tide of progress—go, whatever the cost!"

"But where? Did I ever tell you about my friends the Beechams?" asked the A.M., tucking away a hair-pin in her agitation. "They wanted quiet, and left Surrey and went right up into Scotland, where they bought a place on a moor—miles away from everywhere. They'd only been there a year when a film studio came and settled within half a mile, with arc lights, corrugated-iron sheds, and a rabble of odd people in the village."

"We are getting away from the point," I said, irritably. "Who says they're making a new road past here?"

"Lady Almina told us yesterday. She heard

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from someone who had seen the plans," answered the P.M.

In the past I had heard so many strange things from Lady Almina Lushington-Crowfoot that I had become very suspicious of her news. She had a habit of getting things the wrong way round. She had once given me a dozen peony roots and they grew up into hollyhocks. Surely she was wrong again.

"No, I don't think she is—I saw a man with a theodolite standing in a field up at Bix," said the A.M. "When I asked him what he was doing, he said, 'Surveying'—as if I didn't know that! And when I asked him what he was surveying, he said, 'The field.' He was so determined to be rude that I left him. I fear it's only too true."

We discussed the matter for half an hour. The idea was preposterous. It meant sharp turns, a very steep gradient, removing two cottages and cutting through the grounds of a large house.

"But that's just what they love doing," declared the A.M., stamping on the lawn. "You've got leather jackets!"

I looked at the A.M. blankly. I had never worn a leather jacket in my life. And what if I had, what had it to do with a ruinous new road?

"In the lawn—don't you know what I mean?" asked the A.M.

"Frightful things when you get 'em," said the P.M. gloomily.

"What are leather jackets? Weeds?" I asked.

"Oh, much worse!" exclaimed the A.M. with enthusiasm. "It's the *tipula oleracea*—or the more

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familiar daddy-long-legs. The larvæ live underground and feed on the roots of the grass. They'll ruin your lawn."

"What does one do?"

"Can't do anything, really. They'll sell you all sorts of chemicals—none of 'em any good," growled the P.M. "Amelia, we ought to go."

The P.M. raised his walking-stick, the one with the boar's tusk head, and poked at one of the old beams of the cottage wall. A piece of mortar clattered down.

"A bit of dry-rot there—you'd better dress it, or it'll go further," he said, still poking, in the hope of going further.

The A.M. must have seen the mingled hate and despair in my eyes as I looked at the wretched fellow.

"Poultenay—we must go, and you're depressing Mr. Roberts."

"Well, it is dry-rot; you mustn't leave a thing like that. Good-bye—lovely tulips, very late, aren't they?" he cried, following the A.M. to the gate.

I let them go and made no answer. When the gate closed I realised they had left me in ruins. The main road was to be laid right under my windows, the lawn had an incurable disease, and my cottage had dry-rot.

Stunned, I waited while the car squeaked and rumbled out of hearing. They had brought me some dahlias. What was the good of dahlias, when the garden and the cottage and my existence were doomed? My indignation began to rise. I would fight them.

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But only an idiot fought with a Public Authority. The laws of England were complex enough to ruin any man with litigation. Moreover, I had always declared it useless to attempt to stem the march of events. But I had never imagined they would march on me like that ! I had heard of these things happening to other people, but somehow had never thought they would happen to me.

I looked at the old cottage, so warm and friendly in the sunset glow. Its three dormer windows had looked on to that road for over three hundred years. It had twisted and shrunken under the summer suns of centuries, grown to a pattern the hand of man could never fashion, its tiles rich with the patina of the recurrent seasons. Through its door had passed yeomen and peasants, subjects of Queen Elizabeth, King James King Charles, Queen Anne, the five Georges. To it, quiet in the green of the hills and the seclusion of the Chiltern valley, had come the rumour of distant strife, of battles at Oudenarde, Malplaquet, Trafalgar, and Waterloo, of rebellion in America and India. Once to its very doors the tide of battle had almost flowed ; a mile hence Prince Rupert had skirmished, and a few miles hence Squire Hampden, mortally wounded, had leaned painfully in his saddle, making for Pyrton Manor, his first wife's old home, and had been turned aside to an inn at Thame.

A hundred years ago the old place, and the quiet valley in which it lies, had been menaced by a sooty devil. In 1833 a railway had been projected, to run from Tring across the Chilterns to Reading and Basingstoke. It was to emerge from a tunnel at Assendon,

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almost by my garden, and run down the north-east side of the Fairmile. But Providence killed that scheme. A railway that crawled as far as Watlington died out, and these southern Chilterns have been left unravished, for the railway dies out at Henley also, and the gap in between these lines is virgin soil. So my cottage had escaped the iron tread of progress. The current of traffic had flowed, unmolested, at its gate, then had left, and now was to flow back.

But what a different, disastrous flow! The pedestrian, the horseman, the broad-wheeled wagon, the gay stage-coach, from the age of Augustus Imperator to the girlhood of Victoria Regina, had traversed the road, where now an odd motor-car, astray, battled till the old track died out in heavy ruts and rain-filled holes on the steep hill to Bix Common.

The last crimson of sunset flamed overhead. The cottage settled in shadow, white-faced, heavily lined in black timber—a little frightened, it seemed to me, crouching groundwards at the threat of doom; for lumbering lorries would shake it down, its garden be violated by an age of steel, petrol, and the screaming votaries of m.p.h.

With a heavy heart I entered the cottage and shut the door.

III

I was more cheerful in the morning. One of my bedroom windows looks out on to a beechwood that rises like a green ocean billow against the sky. The lilac is just coming into bloom, and my horse-chestnut this year has flowered after several barren years—why,

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no one seems to know. I hope it will now be a yearly event. The horse-chestnut delights me less with its blossom than with its leaf-buds. There is nothing lovelier than the process through which these pass, from a sticky mahogany to a gosling downiness, and then into a finger-like leafiness. But the true delights of this transition are seen best indoors. In the first week of March I cut three wands with sticky buds completely sealed. They took three weeks to open, and in the first week of April the leaves began to uncurl out of their white silky wrapping. This unfolding process continued for another fortnight, and only in the eighth week, when fourteen out of seventeen buds had matured in leaves, was there any sign of the branches dying. In the first stage of unfolding the long, green leaves are quaintly umbrella-like, and their odd shapes suggest animate objects such as butterflies, a duck's bill, a gloved hand, and give continuous delight with their fantastic posturing.

After June, when the chestnut has ceased to flower, I find it a dull tree. It gives a deep shade, but its thick, heavy leaves are not sensitive to light as are so many trees. Its trunk is 'dead,' it lacks the lovely smoothness and patina of the beech, but for its March budding and its May flowering it is welcome in my garden, and in late Autumn its fallen leaves have a purple bloom.

My first act on going downstairs this particular morning, still in pyjamas and dressing-gown, was to look at the Noisy Nuisance. This is not a dog or an old car—it is the house cistern. It keeps me in a constant state of apprehension and annoyance. I could,

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of course, send for the plumber. But it is part of the fun of living in the country that you do odd jobs yourself, and it has become a matter of honour that I shall not be defeated by anything in the domestic category. I have made a brick fireplace, cleaned a boiler, 'wired' electric lights, shifted the telephone across the room (without asking the G.P.O.), put a lock on the coal-house door, repaired the well, plastered the walls, mended windows—cutting the glass included—and, in general, performed the odd jobs that give me a reason for not doing my proper job.

My first investment on going to live in the country was a carpenter's bench and a large box of tools. There is room in the country for this sort of expansion. The flat dweller is at the mercy of the plumber, the electrician, the joiner, the painter, and the bricklayer. The door-handle that comes off remains off until 'a man' is called in. The door that squeaks, the window that rattles, the light that flickers, the lock that won't turn, the tap that will drip, a score of discomforts and annoyances have a long lease in the house without tools. "I must have a man in," says the man with no tools and no time. In the country there is time and there are tools, and some of us live more in the jobbing shed than in the potting shed, since we prefer pottering to potting.

But I seem to have met my Waterloo. The Noisy Nuisance defeats me, yet I will not call a man in and admit failure. Who invented that preposterous contrivance the ball-cock? And why are they always inaccessibly placed? Cisterns, of course, must be in the roof, since they supply the down flow, but why

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should they gurgle and splutter and shudder, and in the stillness of the night hiss venomously, or play a ghostly liquid tune—*ting-ping-plop ! ting-ping-plop ! sssssss-ting-ping-plop !*

Last night, as I went up to bed, I looked in the bathroom, spying on the Noisy Nuisance. This time it was quiet, and I mistrusted it even more for this ominous stillness. Scarcely had I left the room than my misgiving was justified. An inane gurgling mocked me in the passage. I stopped, listening intently in the still house. Outside, a high full moon seemed to have pulled my four poplar trees up to twice their normal height. The country-side lay cold and white, the woods were black. It was a breathless night, a deep silence lay——

ssssssssss-sss-gggr-sssss-cluck ! gibbered the Noisy Nuisance as I reached my bedroom door. From sad experience I knew what that meant. The ball-cock was leaking, the overflow-pipe would soon be reached, and mischief would be abroad. For the overflow-pipe splashed on to a low roof, it saturated the wall, the plaster became soft on the inside, the porcelain tiles over the bathroom washbowl fell, the bowl was cracked, and the Noisy Nuisance up above gibbered in delight at its destruction.

Five times I had been up into the roof, bent to an excruciating angle, under dark tiles. Five times had the Noisy Nuisance defied my tools to get a grip on it. I had removed sacking and straw, its winter jacket, and about me fell the dust of years. Spiders scurried over me, I grazed my knuckles, dropped my nippers in the tank, lost my temper, knocked over the light,

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and, perspiring and determined, assured my house-keeper she should have the water turned on in five minutes.

Victory at last? It seemed so; for a week there was no spluttering, no fiendish midnight gurgle, no drip of the overflow. I went to Town for a few days and forgot the Noisy Nuisance. But it had an ample revenge. It began to whistle and sizzle with fiendish vehemence every time water was drawn. I went up into the roof again. I do not know who first invented the ball-cock and valve. One of Queen Elizabeth's courtiers, Sir John Harington, they say, invented the first water-closet, and wrote a pamphlet about it called 'The Metamorphosis of Ajax,' which he ascribed to his servant, since no gentleman could discover such things. It contained diagrams of the new invention that improved on those singular 'garderobes' perched high over the moats of Norman castles. When castles began to be moatless the sanitation problem increased. Sir John was the precursor of the cistern and the ball-cock. His name is quite undeservedly forgotten. He gave England for centuries a much-deserved pre-eminence until the United States captured the blue riband of plumbing, which has been carried to such lengths in America that there is a standard joke about being given a house if one pays for the plumbing.

Poor Sir John Harington, he deserves well of posterity. The Romans put up a statue to *Venus Cloacina*, the goddess of sewers, but we have paid no tribute to Sir John. Yet plumbers as a trade are shameless advertisers of their wares. How often in

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the remotest corners of Europe, wherever the Grand or less Grand Hotel has raised its sign, have I encountered 'The Twyford,' or some other trade-name boldly displayed across the white porcelain! There is a similar passion for advertisement on cisterns. Why should the trade-name, and the maker's name, together with his address, be so boldly set forth in the most private places? Is anyone interested? Does anyone make a note to ask for that particular brand? We should resent any such display on the rims of our teacups; then why on other rims?

The first ball-cock cistern was invented about 1750. Since then it has made a noise in the house, and betrayed us. Motor-cars have provoked into existence an Anti-noise Society. The cistern should have done this many years ago. Why should a whole household be made to hear a sudden uproar in some distant part of the building?

My Noisy Nuisance was a great sinner in this way. I sought the cause, and, discovering it, marvelled at the race of plumbers. The water, coming from the ball-cock at great pressure, is projected like a miniature Niagara to the lower water level. It requires only a tube to conduct the stream noiselessly into the water of the cistern. I fitted an india-rubber tube. The cistern filled with scarcely a gurgle. I had silenced the Noisy Nuisance with this feeder.

Somewhat elated by this discovery, I inspected the Noisy Nuisance on rising the next morning. The sinister hissing was gone, there was no overwhelming uproar, no ominous gurgling, no telegraphic communication through the pipes round the house. The

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morning had begun well. A little thing, perhaps, but life in the country is a battle with little things, and triumph over them is eventful and sweet. I have known a man greet me in the lane with enormous gusto, his whole demeanour changed, merely because he had devised a means of keeping field rabbits out of his kitchen garden. Had he lived in a large city a ten-point rise in his gold shares would not have elated him so much.

But the morning had a deep shadow despite the conquest of the Noisy Nuisance. A bigger noise and nuisance threatened me, the new road. Again I consulted my six-inch Ordnance map. The obvious idiocy of the scheme promoted comfort. It was too fantastic. Nevertheless, I had to go out to the garden gate, clad as I was in pyjamas, dressing-gown, and slippers, to have a look at the old road. A neighbour's cows were grazing on the grass margins. At the end of my 'village' a row of cottages, red-tiled, faced me at the right-angled bend where the road rose abruptly to Bix. In one of those cottages an old lady of ninety, after an attack of influenza, last year, had been left blind, but she was still irrepressibly cheerful, and often sat in the door to feel the sun in her face. How lovely and peaceful the place was this morning! My four poplars did not stir. *The Golden Ball* blinked in the early sun, the dew on the grass glittered, a cuckoo shouted down the valley, and, as if to emphasise the quiet, a car distantly rumbled as it ascended the main road to Oxford.

I walked round the cottage, partly to make certain that the Noisy Nuisance had not dripped in the night,

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for my fears will never be completely allayed after experience of its cunning, but chiefly for the pleasure it always gives me to make the circuit of my lawn, to look at the back roof unbroken in its descent from ridge to garden level, to see what shrubs were flowering—on the old bake-oven jutting out behind the study fireplace. What a May morning, heavy-dewed, cloudless, with the scent of lilac in the air, and the forsythia in a golden cascade under the east window. Perhaps it would be warm enough to begin sun-bathing up on the platform by the garage roof. Three years of sun and rain have made repairs to the timber necessary. Another job awaiting me.

“Oh, Mr. Roberts!” says a reproachful voice through a window.

It is my housekeeper, as usual, scolding me for walking the wet lawn in bedroom-slippers and thin dressing-gown. And breakfast is ready, with the aroma of toast filling the dining-room, and Peter Robin hanging about the doorstep for the discarded crust trimmings. Twenty letters on the salver, a parcel, mysterious and exciting, the morning paper with its tale of unrest, out of tune with the peace of my retreat, the breakfast-table bright with silver and pheasant-pattern china, the teapot in its quilted chintz cozy, a whiff from the pomander hanging from a beam, and the whole fresh, sunny morning to do what I please in—how silly to worry about anything! That road won't come, I'm certain. The A.M. and the P.M. are a pair of scare-mongers. They are always in a state of agitation. Only a week ago they had discovered they were on the route between two aerodromes. “Very serious, you

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know, very serious. Certain to be bombed!" growled the P.M. "Makes us a war zone! And the noise! Also, they might drop something accidentally." "And it hinders the gardener and the servants, always looking up!" added the A.M.

No, the morning was too pleasant to worry over the forebodings of the A.M. and P.M. It was going to be a sunny day. I should mow the lawn, stake up the lupins, make a bookshelf for the guest-room, and perhaps write a thousand words of the new book—perhaps, for at four o'clock I was taking tea with Miss Whissitt. She would know all there was to be known about the new road, and what she knew was always accurate.

IV

I must not describe Miss Whissitt's house too thoroughly, or the peace of Filldyke may be broken. Why 'Filldyke' I often wondered, for there was no dyke anywhere near, nor any water to fill one. One day I asked her, and the answer was a lesson in the corruption our speech suffers in the passage of time. "It's nothing to do with a dyke," she explained. "Some two hundred years ago it belonged to a man called Philip Duke, and Phil Duke's become Filldyke. There's something much stranger than that. In the local records between 1236 and 1525 Bix has been called Bixe Gobwin, Bixe Brand, Bixbraund, Buxegibwyne, Bixegibewin, Bixegybwyn, Bixe Jebyn, Byxgybuyn, Byxjubbyn, Bixbrinde, Bykesbund, and Wyxcgybbewyne—that's Bix Bottom all ways up, if you like! It makes you think Bacon may have been only another way of spelling Shakespeare!"

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I hope I shall not provoke mirth when I say that Bix has the finest bottom in Oxfordshire. The Chilterns around me have a wealth of Bottoms, but Bix, with its steep circular hillside, thickly wooded, is justly renowned. Filldyke is an old house, Elizabethan oak, flint, and rubble, with the pointed dormer windows common to the district. It probably belonged to humble peasants, though there is the mysterious fact that the living-room has a Tudor arch fireplace, which must have been transported from a larger house in the district. Miss Whissitt believes it was filched from Greys Court, when that mansion was left derelict for a time. The house looks up the valley, but has the serious drawback of so many of the more delightfully situated houses in the fold of the Chilterns. Most of the valleys run north and south, and with perverse consistency the best views lie northwards.

Miss Whissitt says there is another reason. The Elizabethan builders liked facing north. They believed the south wind brought the plague. It sounds fantastic until one remembers that even to-day the plague-wind is believed in. When there was a recent serious outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Lincolnshire a Ministry of Agriculture official told me that the theory was strongly held that the outbreak had followed the track of the prevailing west wind. After all, if one believes in good or bad smells, the plague-wind is not incredible. The Tudors and Elizabethans, we know, placed great faith in pomanders to preserve them from infection. It was a pleasanter conceit than inoculation. The pomander was a ball of aromatic substances, well selected and mixed, and was carried as a preservative

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against infection. Pomander boxes have provided us with some of the most skilful examples of the jeweller's art.

One pomander provided me with a most delightful 'ghost.' A friend had sent me from Bath a pomander, which in this case was an orange stuck over with cloves and spices. I hung it from a beam in the dining-room. I was told that it would drive flies away—the plague of country cottages—but the flies, alas! considered it an excellent convenience. One night in winter, on entering the study, I noticed a faint perfume and ascribed it to a lady who had recently departed. But it was present the next night, and for several nights, and I was utterly baffled by this mysterious perfume. I mentioned the matter to various guests, and they were equally puzzled but enchanted by the mystery. Two of my friends were certain it was a ghost. Ghosts opened doors, moved furniture, rattled objects, and moaned, why shouldn't ghosts leave a perfume behind them? It was probably an unhappy but lovely lady who moved through my rooms leaving a trail of perfume in her wake. It was a pleasant fancy, but two facts 'laid' my ghost—it was not an old-established visitor, it had only appeared in the last few weeks, and its presence was always detectable immediately after dinner, at nine o'clock to be precise. All the ghosts I have ever heard of keep late hours—the stroke of midnight is their favourite excursion hour. A nine o'clock visitor seemed out of the true ghost tradition. The mystery would have remained unsolved had I not one evening, during dinner, been called to the telephone in the study. On returning to the dining-room, I struck

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the ghostly trail of perfume and followed it to its source. The mystery was solved. The candelabrum on the table was immediately under the old pomander suspended from the beam. The heat of the candles baked the pomander, and the aroma was carried across the room into the warm study by the draught of air coming down the staircase and making a course through to the study fireplace. We were all very sorry to lose our delicately perfumed ghost.

Fillydyke Cottage has, or had, a ghost. The learned Dr. Robert Plot, walking about Oxfordshire in 1766, has much to say about *poltergeists* or turbulent spirits, which seem to have an affection for the county. This last year the town of Henley was excited by the 'doings' of one in a private house. The poltergeist at Fillydyke Cottage became so unruly that the occupant had to leave. It put out fires, broke windows and crockery, threw buckets down the well, and tore off roof tiles. In this manner the cottage became empty and remained so for a couple of years, when Miss Whissitt, following the death of her father, took it in defiance of all the dire prophecies and the advice of her friends. If there was such a thing she would deal with it, she said, grimly. When, on the second night of Miss Whissitt's occupancy of Fillydyke Cottage, a cherished Vauxhall mirror fell from the wall and was smashed beyond repair all the neighbourhood was thrilled, and shook its head sadly. Two days later a window was blown in during the night.

The neighbourhood now awaited more disastrous events and made renewed appeals to Miss Whissitt to leave. She replied, with scorn, that the mirror fell

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because of an act of idiocy on the part of the furniture remover, who had hung it on a loose nail, and the window-smashing was an act of God, since a gale had swept the country-side that night. Thereafter, Miss Whissitt was left in peace. If she had any feeling towards the poltergeist, it was one of gratitude. It had enabled her to obtain a cheap lease of a charming property.

Fillydyke Cottage is delightfully furnished. It is not in period, that is, you do not get an ache in the place that Queen Elizabeth complained about so bitterly. In the end that poor lady, in protest, died sitting up on cushions, if tradition be true. Why, because a cottage has oak beams, one should be expected to sit on oak seats, amid clumsy and lugubrious pieces, I can never appreciate. I notice that the determination to be 'period' stops with candles, and even if electric light be 'taboo,' the plumbing and the car in the garage show the twentieth century cannot be kept at bay. Miss Whissitt suffers from no nonsense of this kind. Like myself, she was ruthless with beams on which she banged her head, and cut them away or raised them. I have friends with an Elizabethan stoop, a curvature of the spine induced by living in places where they must walk with lowered heads, in constant danger of being brained.

Fillydyke Cottage is a place of sunshine, white paint, gay chintzes, low soft chairs, and singing canaries. 'Rollers' she calls them. They sing vociferously and there are moments when I almost wish they were dumb, so deafening is their shrill song. They always transport me to an hotel in Havana, where the singing of the

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canaries in the *patio*, in which one took tea, was so deafening that conversation was quite impossible. Living with canaries is a good preparation for staying in houses where the radio is braying from morning till night, and life runs to an accompaniment of continuous noise. Miss Whissitt, let me add, does threaten Ramon, Micky, Buster, Adolph, Douglas, Ronald, Conrad, and half a dozen other Hollywood-christened songsters, with the fly-swatter, but they are never really cowed by that floppy piece of wire net which Miss Whissitt keeps handy in every room. The film-star gallery was started, I may add, by the human Ronald, whom I took to tea, and who presented her with a canary, one of many embarrassing tributes that cluttered up his hotel suite. I am sure that Miss Whissitt would greatly have preferred Ronald in a cage—he sings much better than any canary—so completely charmed was she by his captivating simplicity and his decorative presence.

“Ha, you are always so punctual—one of the greatest virtues, *n'est-ce pas?*” exclaimed Miss Whissitt, greeting me. “Put your hat up there.”

‘Up there’ was the antler of a stag, whose head was wrapped up in blue sugar-bag paper. She must have seen me staring at the singular hat-rack, for she explained, “I wrapped it up two years ago, when I went away, to keep the moth out—there’s camphor inside, and somehow I’ve never taken it off again. I’m not sure it isn’t better like that. I loathe stags’ heads, but my father thought the world of it. He was once invited to a stalk—is that right?—sounds like a vegetarian

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orgy!—by the Duke of Sutherland. He never got over it quite, wrote to everybody on the house note-paper, and came home with that, and had a brass tablet put under it. Excuse my gardening boots. And now for the Italian garden. You'll find it quite pathetic, that's why I keep it hidden away. Some like a gnome or a nymph in the garden. I pined for a *pozzo*. *Chacun à son goût, n'est-ce pas?* "

No wonder I had never seen Miss Whissitt's Italian garden. It was on the other side of her summer-house, and you went into it through an iron-wrought gate most cunningly hidden by two Irish yews. When we had entered I stood in silent amazement at Miss Whissitt's *tour-de-force*. It was Italy. The illusion was complete. At the end of a long green path, bordered with clipped ilexes, there was a loggia, built against a kitchen-garden wall. It had everything one expects of an Italian loggia. The penthouse roof was made of old Chiltern tiles, flat brown ones that had been cunningly laid to look like Tuscan tiles. The front of the roof rested on two white columns. The floor of the loggia was paved with marble fragments, not in any design, but in a crazy patchwork, the marble being of all colours. On the back wall there were half a dozen Della Robbia plaques, and in the middle, on a small Roman capital, jutting out to make a shelf, was a stone head of Petrarch, laurelled. Against the wall there was a Roman stone bench with two lions for arms at each end, and lion's-claw feet. As we approached the loggia I saw that along the lintel supporting the roof a motto had been carved in the oak.

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'Lasciate ogni dolore voi ch' entrate in questo giardino.'

I read the Italian words.

"But they're lovely—'Leave behind all sorrow ye who enter in this garden.' It's familiar somehow—is it yours?"

Miss Whissitt laughed delightedly.

"Oh, no—I've corrupted a line of Dante's. It's from the inscription over the gate of Hell, if you please! *Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate.* 'Abandon hope all ye that enter here.'—Is it very wrong of me to turn it round like that?"

"I prefer it to Dante—he was always so unpleasant. But the work you've done!" I exclaimed.

Even now, as I entered the loggia, and turned to view the garden, fresh wonders came into sight. It was obvious at once that the *coup d'œil* had been planned from this viewpoint. At the end of the garden rose a superb vista. In a frame of cypress trees there was a distant view of the far hillside covered with woods. The cypress trees were young, but they stood dark and dramatic against the skyline. I noticed, then, how cleverly Miss Whissitt had incorporated two Lombardy poplars, that must have been there quite fifty years. They rose to the sky, immensely tall, each marking a corner of the rectangular garden. But I was soon to make further discoveries. On my right, looking out of the loggia, parallel with the old wall, ran another path, and about ten yards away, on a circular stone pavement, was Miss Whissitt's *pièce de résistance*. It was a veritable Italian well-head, carved with heraldic shields, with a flat broad rim of weathered marble. There was

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no doubt, it was an authentic *pozzo*, one of those countless well-heads found in every Venetian *campo*, or in the courtyard of a palace or convent. This was an excellent specimen, probably fifteenth-century workmanship. I had once, in a moment of temptation, fed by the sheer beauty of the thing, bargained for a *pozzo* which had come out of the courtyard of a palace on the Grand Canal. It bore the arms of a family of Venetian patricians, one which had contributed a Doge to the Republic, as well as many senators. It had been, I was assured, a part of that very palace in which Pietro Aretino, that blackmailing journalist of the sixteenth century, had lived, the palace of Domenico Bolani, opposite the Rialto. The price had not seemed too outrageous, but the cost of transport ! Sadly I let the chance slip. And here was Miss Whissitt, in 'straitened circumstances,' as they say, with a real and quite lovely *pozzo* !

"It's all cost you a fearful amount !" I said.

"Hardly anything. *Vraiment* !"

There was a tinkling sound of water. From a Medusa-head in the garden wall spouted a silver jet of water. I had wondered why Miss Whissitt had been furtively seeking something under her skirt. She had turned on a tap and the fountain flowed. The direction of this fountain brought another surprise into view. To the left of the loggia, beyond the Medusa-head, there was a pergola. I was prepared for a pergola ; it is the first piece of scenic property to erect in an Italian garden. But Miss Whissitt's pergola was the real thing ; that is, it was not a clawing rambling-rose tunnel that one enters in peril of skin and clothes, it was a

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vine-pergola with a thick-grown roof. Now, as anyone knows, a vine cannot be grown overnight, or in a season. It is a matter of years, of twenty years at least. Miss Whissitt had been at Filldyke Cottage only three years. How had that vine pergola been spirited forth?

"You didn't find the vine pergola here when you came?" I asked, recovering breath.

"*Mais oui et non. C'est ravissant, n'est-ce pas?*" said Miss Whissitt, again fumbling under her skirt, as we sat on the bench. "I used a little cunning. When I came here there was a vine in the greenhouse."

"But you can't transport a vine out of a greenhouse and set it down on a pergola!" I protested.

"No, you can't. So Mahomet went to the mountain. In other words, the pergola went to the vine. I built the pergola under the vine and then pulled down the greenhouse. It was a beastly thing anyhow," continued Miss Whissitt, "always dropping rain down your neck and smelling like a monkey-house, and fungoidy and hot-earthly. As for the grapes—it had two consumptive bunches, and unless you can do that sort of thing well I would rather buy my grapes in a shop, and turn down the poor stuff. Look at the P.M.!—he confessed that, what with coke for the stove, putty for the glass, and insecticide for the mealy bug, it cost him a shilling a grape!"

There was another tinkle, this time of water on leaves. I looked in the direction of the sound and the unbelievable greeted my eyes. Miss Whissitt had turned another tap and a small boy was watering a lily

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pond. That vulgar little boys are sometimes guilty of such habits, though lily ponds are never their objective, I am aware, but I did not expect to find this act memorialised in stone.

Miss Whissitt gave a chuckle of delight.

"*C'est charmant ; le petit adorable !*" she cried.

"Of course, you know what that is?"

I knew, of course, but it seemed tactless to ask me.

"My cousin brought me it from Brussels. It's a copy of the original bronze Manneken Pis, that everybody buys."

"Not everybody," I averred.

"Don't be prudish. It's very charming and natural, and I love the story of the Flemish merchant who lost his little boy, and found him like that, so put up a monument to the child."

"I hope you won't turn on any more taps," I said, nervously. "It reminds me of the Hellbrunn, the Prince-Bishop of Salzburg's *Lustschloss*—some water-wag designed the gardens. When you enter the Schloss it rains heavily on you, inside there is a fantastic grotto of fountains that make birds whistle and animals move. When you come out water spouts over you from the antlers of stags. There's an outdoor theatre worked by water, and the flower-beds are glassed over by waterfalls. You tread on a pavement and it drenches you, and when you sit down you provoke a cold douche. Those Prince-Bishops must have had a strange sense of humour—and why all that artificial water in the wettest place in Europe?"

"The Manneken's my only water-spout, so don't be

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afraid," said Miss Whissitt. "What are you looking at now?"

"Those azaleas—I can't grow them; how do you do it?"

"Mr. Woolworth does it—sixpence a pot. They're very hardy—*Azalea mollis* \times *sinensis*. After they'd flowered last year I cut them back, repotted them, and put them in the kitchen, as I haven't got a hothouse. Then I put some peat in the beds and planted them out this spring."

My eyes ran enviously over the salmon-red azaleas. It was really useless asking how it was done. Miss Whissitt has 'growing' fingers. I've seen her stab an old stick into the ground and it's come to life like a cinema nature-lesson.

"This Italian garden hasn't cost a lot really," went on Miss Whissitt. "I made the roof myself out of the tiles from the old pig-shed; the wood came from there also."

"But the stone columns—whatever did those cost?" I protested.

Miss Whissitt smiled triumphantly.

"So they deceived you! They're not stone, they're painted tin. They were in a temporary Lyons' restaurant at the Olympia Motor Show. I saw them dismantling the place, and when they were carrying them out I offered the man a pound, and got them."

"You'll not tell me you got the *pozzo* for a pound. It's worth a hundred at least!"

"*Quanto costa un pozzo, prego?*" murmured Miss Whissitt.

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"Where did you learn Italian?"

"In Italy when I was a war-nurse there."

"Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. If it's not a rude question, how much did this *pozzo* cost? It's magnificent!"

"It is a rude question, but I'll tell you," retorted Miss Whissitt sprightly, turning off the fountains.

"Nothing at all, except a few bridge lessons. You don't know Mrs. Drury? No? Well, she once said she'd give anything if she could play bridge like me. I took her at her word and offered her twenty bridge lessons for her *pozzo*. Her husband bought it when they pulled down Grosvenor House—it stood in the garden where the hotel now is. It looked quite ridiculous jammed in Mrs. Drury's back area, and I knew she cared nothing about it because her chauffeur kept his petrol tins in it. She jumped at my offer. And she delivered it free!"

"You fill me with despair," I said.

A gong sounded.

"That's tea—come along," said Miss Whissitt, rising. "I suppose you want to know what everything cost?"

"I think I know you well enough to say 'yes.' You see, you've staggered me. First of all, I didn't know you had an Italian garden. Then, when you invited me to see it, I thought it would be two cypresses in boxes, a plaster cast of Dante, and a Florentine chair with crossed X legs."

"Crossed X?"

"So—8," I replied, drawing curves in the air.

"They are beloved of all interior decorators. With

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two of those, ten yards of scarlet velvet, one large candlestick, and a wry-necked Madonna, they'll give you an Italian room—*camera di cinquecento*."

"I know you want to be rude about the Della Robbia plaques," said Miss Whissitt, smiling.

"Yes, a little, they are rather——"

"Too-too. Yes, I know it. Of course, if they'd been genuine—— They cost ten shillings each in a Reading china shop. I regretted it later, but they have to be used now."

"And the marble pavement to the loggia, a pound also?" I enquired, derisively.

"Exactly," replied Miss Whissitt. Then, seeing the incredulity on my face, added: "Have you ever been down New Street—actually it's one of Henley's oldest streets, quite four hundred years old—and seen those two Elizabethan cottages on the right as you go to the river? They're just above where the cheese fair used to be, and almost opposite the house where Mrs. Lybbe Powis, of whom you wrote in *Gone Rambling*, lived at the end of her days. There's an entry between those two cottages—have you ever been up it?"

"No—I don't think I've ever noticed it."

"Neither had I until two years ago, and then I had a delightful surprise," said Miss Whissitt. "When you've gone through it you emerge on a row of cottages squatting behind. They're all huddled up, and in front of them there's a high brick wall and a brewery beyond, which is about as formidable an outlook as one can imagine. But the cottages are a joy to see—they're pure Elizabethan with odd roofs and chimneys and

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quaint twisted faces, and latticed windows. They've tiny gardens, and in front of these there's a marble pathway. Somebody's had extraordinary patience. It's composed of mixed marble fragments, white, black, brown, orange, green, and blue, and it's so gay and full of life that it quite annuls the dreadful wall and the cramped space. That set me longing for a mixed marble pavement, but I feared it would cost far too much. Well, one day I was walking down the King's Road, Chelsea, and came upon a yard filled with housebreaker's junk—old tin baths, window frames, slates, kitchen sinks, iron gates, stone urns, and cisterns. Among it all I saw a lovely lead cistern with the date 1760 on it. I knew I couldn't afford it but I had to ask. And, of course, it was forty pounds. As I was coming out I tripped over some bits of marble and then saw there was a great pile of it. I thought at once of that pavement, so I asked how much it cost. A pound a ton, delivered anywhere. The old man must have seen me tremble, and thought it was the price. 'They're lovely pieces; you won't find 'em cheaper anywhere.' As soon as I'd recovered breath I bought a ton, and listened a week for the lorry. When it came, do you know there were complete marble mantelshelves among it!"

"What did you do with them?" I asked, as we entered the cottage.

"Made them into that bench we were sitting on—I had the two lion-ends made by the local stone-mason. Will you have a crumpet?" asked Miss Whissitt lifting a cover.

I took a crumpet.

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"There remains the Medusa's head," I said, quietly.

"Oh, that—that's the simplest of all!" laughed Miss Whissitt. "I made it."

"You—but can you carve stone?"

"No—and it isn't stone. It's papier mâché. I pulped up a lot of cardboard boxes and modelled the head from a postcard I got at the British Museum. When it had set I painted it stone-colour. It's wonderful what you can do when you try, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"When *you* try, yes," I agreed, quite overwhelmed.

"Why, I always regard you as the Leonardo da Vinci of the district! You're so wonderful with——"

"Can I have two lumps?" I said, passing back my teacup. There were moments when Miss Whissitt's romanticism had to be sternly checked. "I'm rather worried," I continued; "there's a rumour that they're going to make a fresh Oxford road and bring it down past my cottage, on the old Oxford road."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Miss Whissitt, at once. "It's idiotic! They cut the new Oxford road because yours was too steep a gradient. Who told you that story?"

"Well, it came from Lady Almina via the A.M. and the P.M. They called yesterday and——"

"It would!" interrupted Miss Whissitt, who has never been a great friend of Lady Almina's since, so local gossip reports, they quarrelled on a local hospital

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committee over a question of bed-socks, which Miss Whissitt declared to be unhygienic.

"I can tell you exactly what will happen," she said. "They're going to make a new cutting across at Bix—the *Fox and Grapes* will be pulled down and a new inn erected on the other side of the road. It's to cost thousands of pounds."

"Why?—the road's not dangerous."

"If you are wise you won't ask questions like that. All over England the same thing is going on. Battles are being waged by outraged house owners against the local authorities. The authorities invariably win because they use the ratepayers' money to go to law against the ratepayer. I think the Bix road's quite safe and you think the Bix road's quite safe, but we are the local users and we'll not be consulted. It's always been like that from Adam to MacAdam. A friend of mine bought a local inn. He retired with his wife and did it up, oldy-worldy, chintzy, and not too much humbug in his wine-cellar. The place began to prosper. Then one fine morning a man appeared with a theodolite, and two slaves walked about with coloured wands at the behest of the great white chief. That was all. They went. A year later there arrived on some ploughed fields forty navvies, a steam shovel, and a night-watchman's box. The village was being by-passed, and my friend's inn, which had stood by the flow of traffic for three hundred years, was left high and dry with not a soul to sit in the four baths so proudly advertised in an art prospectus. He was ruined in a year. There's the other side of the picture, too. You own a nice quiet house in an un-

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frequented street. Suddenly all the traffic is diverted into it, and you are shaken to pieces by vibration and deafened by noise. There is a lot to be said for renting a place—you can quit. There's nothing likely to happen to me here, but I wouldn't buy if I could. The farmer over there might put up galvanised-iron cowsheds, or cover the hill with an eczema of poultry-coops. Have you seen 'Salonika slope' ? ”

I had. It was formerly a most lovely slope under a beechwood. It now had a bungaloid growth, defying the by-laws, because it was on wheels, a poultry run, a rabbitry, and an incessant display of unlovely garments hung out to dry. Four myopic children found life on this foul eruption, and two German Jews, fleeing from Nazidom, had helped in this change of landscape from Watteau to ghetto.

“ To-morrow I shall walk to Nettlebed, and look at disappearing England,” I said, gloomily.

“ It has always been disappearing, *n'est-ce pas* ? ” retorted Miss Whissitt. “ Have you ever thought of the indignation with which the Jacobeans must have watched Tudor England being pulled to pieces, and the anguish of the early Georgians when the coaches started to make havoc of the bridle-paths ? People were highly indignant when Queen Victoria rode in a train from Slough to London and had the bad taste to like it.”

“ That may be—but all this ravaging and jerry-building across the country-side is a lamentable business,” I grumbled.

“ That's taking a short view. In a hundred years all these jerry-built houses will have tumbled down.

SHEER WHISSITTRY

They're hygienic, but thank God they're not static. Your Elizabethan builder never bothered about drains, and the Bath Road's becoming one long drain with numbers on it. You can't think what a refuge my Italian garden is, it takes me at a bound from petrol to Petrarch! *Moi, je suis du moyen-âge*," said Miss Whissitt. And, having perpetrated her double-entendre, she gave a nervous laugh and rose from the tea-table.

"The A.M. also told me that not only had I got dry-rot in my beams, but leather-jackets in my lawn," I said, as we went into the garden. "They left me just a heap of ruins. Do you know how to deal with leather-jackets? They're crane-fly or daddy-long-legs, aren't they?"

"I can deal better with them than I can with the A.M. and P.M.," laughed Miss Whissitt. "Yes, the leather-jacket's the grub of the crane-fly. It's an awful pest and there's no real cure. Last year they got twelve tons out of the cricket ground at Lord's. The grubs eat the roots of the grass, and then emerge as flies in the early autumn. You should swat them; one fly will lay over four hundred eggs in the soil."

"Someone said soot was——"

"Someone always recommends soot for something. 'When in doubt, use soot' is a country axiom," retorted Miss Whissitt. "It's no good at all. The best thing is an emulsion of orthodichlorobenzene and——"

"Of what?" I exclaimed.

"Orthodichlorobenzene and Jeyes' Fluid. Pour

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the emulsion on the lawn, and it'll fetch the grubs up to the surface at once. It won't kill them, but you can sweep them up. You can do a large lawn for five shillings. There's nothing devised yet that will kill the grubs and not kill the grass."

I asked Miss Whissitt to write down the recipe and bore it away with me. She was right as usual. The leather-jackets rushed to the surface and I swept them up.



THE FAIRMILE, HENLEY-ON-THAMES.

THE VILLAGE KNOWS

*The village knows Miss Whissitt,
It knows her high-laced boots,
It sees her pass with pots of flowers,
Cuttings and bulbs and roots.*

" Good morning ! " " Good morning ! " " Good morning ! "

*She calls to the folks at their doors ;
They know the enormous umbrella
She erects overhead when it pours.*

*The village knows Miss Whissitt,
' Disappointed in love,' they say :
So a cat inherits the soft caress
A child might have known one day ;
And her quick, warm heart embraces
An assortment of suffering things,
Sick children, deaf grandads, lost animals,
And crazed birds with broken wings.*

*The village knows Miss Whissitt,
Who walks in sun or rain,
Who discusses foot-and-mouth disease
With the farmer up the lane,
Who knows the year the parson died,
And why the squire's young son
Cannot come back to England
For something he has done.*

*The village knows Miss Whissitt,
It knows her smiling face,
Her stick, her hat, her keen blue eyes,
Her brooch on the bunch of lace ;
But what they do not know is how
This soul they think so odd
Through a life of countless kindnesses
Walks daily nearer God.*

CHAPTER IV

OF SHRUBS AND RECTORS

I

FOR a whole year I had no gardener to help me at my cottage. Then, one June night, as I rolled up the long hosepipe in the darkness, I decided that vanity was proving too costly. This minute garden of mine was becoming a burden. My new book, after eight months' absence from the writing-desk, showed no sign of conception, not to speak of birth. The pile of letters rose and rose. At odd moments, in desperation, I reduced the peak, but the mountain was visibly swelling. I fought with weeds, I staked flowers growing at a prodigious rate, I mowed the lawn twice a week, to keep the dandelions and other enemies from seeding, I struggled with rambler roses that would go over the trellis towards my neighbour to show themselves off, I nailed back the tendrils of the vine. I clipped the privet, and essayed topiary work on the yew that looks like an acorn on a cheese, after three years of trying to make it look like a pheasant. I worked from breakfast to sundown, hurried over meals, scurried in out of my garden into town clothes to attend a luncheon or tea-party, and scurried back again to trim the border or water the beds. The week gone, and Saturday morning come again, I went to the

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station to fetch my guests, looking, I hoped, like a man who worked in a garden.

It was all in vain. "How lovely the garden looks! It's so difficult to find a good gardener these days. You do a little yourself, I suppose?" asked Miss Limp.

"Of course he doesn't! You mustn't be taken in by what he writes!" exclaimed the young man with the pressed trousers and suède shoes.

And then I vindicated myself. "Every bit of the garden has been done by myself. I do not employ a gardener," I said, severely.

"But you don't dig and mow and all that?" cried the young man, with lily-white hands.

"All that. I can handle worms!" I said, witheringly.

"How frightfully enthusiastic," sighed Miss Limp, gathering cushions around her in the garden chair. "You must enjoy it!"

There was nothing more one could say to such people, except offer them a cocktail. Indoors, mixing their poison, I muttered to myself. I should have kept the soil in my nails and have reeked of manual labour, they might have believed me then. People like these judged one not by the soil one dug but by the soil one carried on oneself. Only country-bred people like Tilly, reared in a rectory, knew what work in a garden meant. Tilly herself, who, after her triumphant return from Hollywood, had bought a cottage near Amersham, worked desperately in her garden at week-ends. There were many occasions when, after the curtain had fallen in her West End

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theatre, she had motored the thirty miles to her cottage, arriving after midnight, in order to rise early and put in two hours' work before returning to town for rehearsals. No one, seeing Tilly in *The Tatler*, looking unrustic by a rose-tree, despite a Tuscan straw hat and a hoe in her hands, believed she gardened frantically. But she did not mind what they thought.

But I did. It was because I wanted to be taken seriously that I had reduced myself to a slave of the soil. And now, as I coiled up the garden hose, and ignored the repeated calls of my housekeeper, worried by the dinner getting spoilt, I knew that vanity exacted a fearful price. To-morrow, I must begin hedging, to-morrow I must shift back twelve clumps of dog-daisies, to-morrow I must stake the hollyhock, to-morrow I must oil the lawn-mower, and clip the lawn edges, and prune the forsythia, and weed the path, and rush out to lunch and back again, and, having made a lightning change, tackle the overgrowth behind the trellis, and nail up a clinging creeper that wouldn't cling, and dig out a fungus that——

No, I would not go on like this. I had bought a cottage in the country in order to enjoy the country, and here I was weed-bound, root-rooted, and wheelbarrow-driven from dawn to dusk. I might, had I been less vain, have earned enough with a pen to pay the wages of four gardeners, but in order to hear those lovely words, 'How beautifully you keep it!' I was reducing myself to backache and beggary.

There are stout people who are never bullied by their gardens. I look at them with envy and admiration. There is my neighbour. She catches the 8.50 to town,

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runs a large modiste establishment in the West End, catches the 6.13 home, eats, jumps into Wellingtons and an old skirt, seizes a trowel, labours till moonrise, and, failing a moon, uses a lantern, and on Saturdays and Sundays spends all day with her chin near her feet. Yet on Monday mornings she is straight and bright again, ready to hide a dowager's hips in a cunning creation of crêpe-de-Chine.

In a mood of revolt I complained to Tilly.

"If you must do it yourself, you should go in for more shrubs. They want very little attention. If you planted a shrubbery . . ."

"I always feel it should be called a grubbery," I said. "I hate the grim, grimy things."

"That just shows how prejudiced and ignorant you are. There are glorious shrubs that have masses of lovely flowers," replied Tilly, severely. "There's *Abutilon vitifolium* and *Aplopappus ericoides*—the Californian evergreen, you know, with yellow flower heads half an inch wide, and *Lycium chinense*—with a scarlet fruit, and *Magnolia stellata* that flowers gloriously in March, and cares nothing for frost, and *Camellia cuspidata*, that'll grow in a north position, with white flowers over an inch across, and *Philadelphus virginialis*, a really lovely mock-orange, and what else?—oh, *Osmanthus delavayi*—a gorgeous Chinese evergreen with clusters of April flowers, and *Euonymus* . . ."

"Stop!" I protested, knowing that Tilly would go on like this indefinitely. "You make me dizzy. I like my flowers gay and plenty of them. Your shrubs——"

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"Have you ever seen *Kalmia latifolia* in flower? If you had, you might change your mind," said Tilly. "I can't think why shrubs have been so badly neglected."

"*Kalmia latifolia*," I repeated, getting out the garden notebook. "I'll give it a trial," I said.

I wrote down the name, and then forgot all about it, for soon after that conversation I engaged a gardener and began to accept more invitations to lunch with my neighbours.

One of the invitations took me to Yewden Manor, whence I had once borne off a young Tree of Heaven, now flourishing in my garden. The old house, with its row of gables and tremendous yew hedge, stands at the corner of the Marlow and Hambleden roads. It is within sound of the weir that flashes silver in the evening light where the Thames flows through level meadows, with the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire hills finely grouped around them.

The first bond between my hostess and myself had been a curious one. In *Gone Rustic* I had mentioned Dr. Plot's discovery of a toucan in Oxfordshire, which he called 'a bird of a very rank wing.' Since first I had seen that ludicrous bird I had coveted one, and my Yewden hostess's mother had actually kept one. I have a toucan now, but, alas! this rare bird with the enormous scarlet beak has now been vulgarised by a brewery company on its posters. Let me hasten to add that my toucan, though standing on my desk at the moment and watching me with a curious eye, is not a live one. It has never been alive. Last year when visiting the Nymphenburg china works at the Royal

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Palace outside Munich I was brought finally to the showroom where visitors rarely fail to find temptation. But I was so sorely overspent, having bought a monkey (china) in Bonn, a dog (wood) in Ortisei, and two squirrels (bookrests) in the Italian Tyrol, that I hardened my heart and sought to escape with a simple ash-tray.. And then Fate trapped me. I lifted my eyes, and there on the shelf stood a bird with an enormous scarlet beak and a blue-ringed eye. My heart leaped suddenly. It could not be, and yet surely it was, Dr. Plot's 'bird of a very rank wing.' I was both dismayed and elated.

"What is that bird?" I asked, as indifferently as possible.

"It is a toucan—a very fine bird," said the assistant, taking it down and turning it round.

For a few minutes I was dumb. I thought of Dr. Plot, of my Yewden hostess. I enquired the price; it was not too outrageous for a very rare bird.

"I'll have it," I said faintly.

My companion protested. My bag already bulged with the monkey, the dog, the squirrels, two tapestries acquired at Rothenburg, and a faun from Wurzburg.

"And that ridiculous beak—where will you put it?" demanded Tony, acquiring a lion and a bon-bonnière.

"The beak's not ridiculous!" I protested. "Anyhow, this is fate."

He stared at me. I was inscrutable again. There was nothing to be done.

So there is a toucan in Pilgrim Cottage, albeit a china one. Dr. Plot called his *Pica brasiliensis*, but the bird-

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book calls mine *Ramphastos piscivorus*, and by Ramphastos, I swear.

I therefore had news for my hostess, for I had not seen her since Ramphastos had come to Pilgrim Cottage. But this news was almost driven out of my head by something I saw in a cottage garden bordering the Thames. There was a blaze of flowers of a deep rose colour. When I first caught sight of them I thought they were rhododendrons, owing to the shape of the leaf, but the saucer-like flowers were more open, like a dog-rose. There were three bushes of them, six feet high, and I sat in my car and gazed at them. I must know what they were. I got out and tapped at the cottage door. A large white cat in the window stared at me and then went to sleep again. No one came. I walked round to the back door. There was a note pinned on it. "One brown loaf" I read.

They were out. I looked at that lovely hedge of flowers again. Would they forgive me if I picked a short spray? I would show it to Miss Whissitt, who would certainly know what it was.

I picked a spray. The cat stood up and swelled with indignation. If it could have spoken, it would have shouted 'Thief!' It made me feel I was doing an outrageous thing, going into someone's garden and plucking a spray of flowers. But gardeners are shameless like that. They do not covet their neighbour's wife, nor his aspidistra, but they become kleptomaniacs round the rockery corner. I had once encountered the A.M. and the P.M. down the Fawley lane with their car full of sweet williams. I stopped to

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talk, but they were so flustered, so jerky, that I knew at once that they felt guilty about something.

"What a lot of sweet williams!" I said, maliciously, peering into the back of the car.

"Yes, yes, we're very fond of them," barked the P.M.

"Very cottagy," remarked the A.M., with a forced smile.

"Good-bye!" said the P.M., accelerating.
"We're late. See you soon."

They were gone with a roar, two frightened people and two dozen sweet williams, stolen undoubtedly from the garden of an empty house. True, the house had stood empty for five years, and the garden was going to rack and ruin. I had felt tempted myself, and, having resisted, now felt very virtuous and indignant.

I thought of that moment as I emerged from the gate with the flowers. Suppose the owner turned up and accused me of theft? I could explain, of course—or could I? No one would ever miss a mere spray from a hedge like that. No one would miss a sovereign from the Bank of England, but it would be serious to be caught coming out with one. I hurried to my car, a headline before my eyes:

WELL-KNOWN AUTHOR ROBS COTTAGE GARDEN

How the Press would gloat! For it is singular that no matter how obscure an author may be, he is always 'well-known' as soon as he appears in the police-

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court. His disgrace achieves a circulation never accorded to his books.

I escaped. No one had seen me. Now if I had taken a little bit of the root, instead of a spray that would die . . .

"Disgraceful," I murmured and drove the car faster.

On my return that evening I hurried to Miss Whissitt and produced the spray of flowers.

"Why, of course—don't you know? It's the mountain laurel—this is *Kalmia latifolia*. There's *Kalmia glauca*, with pale purplish flowers, and *Kalmia angustifolia*, not quite so pretty, but attractive with its red flowers."

"Then it's a shrub!" I exclaimed, suddenly recalling Tilly's recommendation.

"Yes, from North America."

"Can you get them here?"

"Easily. Any nurseryman will supply them."

I ordered half a dozen at once and began to enquire into shrubs, the tired gardener's delight.

II

After lunch at Yewden I went on to Hambleden, passing the site of former Roman villas. I would like to keep quiet about Hambleden, to lock it away in its valley and let no one know of it. It is pleasant to think that a fortune founded on W. H. Smith's station book-stalls and bookshops has contributed, in enlightened ownership, to the preservation of the perfect village. But since a film company has visited it, and an excellent

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guide-book has been written about it, there is no point in my pretending we can keep it to ourselves. I think also Lord Hambleden likes it to be visited, for all the footpaths leading to it are well cared-for, and on a southern slope of a wood commanding a magnificent prospect of the Thames valley, he had placed a pilgrim's seat. On how many a morning I have sunned myself there before striking up through a wooded fairyland leading to Fawley !

The village of Hambleden is the American's dream of England. I take them there and watch their eyes open. It has all the requisites—an old church, a stream, a village pump, ancient timbered houses by the churchyard, a noble Elizabethan manor-house, an elegant Georgian rectory, a village red-tiled, with brick chimneys and dormer windows, an old inn, and ancestral elms inhabited by rooks, all nestling under a film of wood smoke, presided over by a clock chiming the hour from the square church tower. Nor is that all. It nestles in a green valley that rises to beech-woods, and to chestnut trees framing Manor and Rectory, and it possesses enough of history, with kings, bishops, knights, and parsons, to make it truly representative of the English scene.

One of the first holders of manorial rights was arrogant Queen Matilda, according to the Domesday Survey, and William Rufus granted her fiefs to Robert Fitz-Hamon, who held a dozen baronies, and whose blood, I like to think, flows in the veins of my tenant at Fawley, Mr. Harman, the retired village blacksmith.

The patronage of the living always went with the Manor, and it is a curious fact that King John held it

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in 1215, when Earl of Gloucester ; the first two signatures on the Magna Carta are those of Richard de Clare, and his son Gilbert, who held the Manor after King John. Ralph Neville, the first rector we hear of, in 1215, was also Chancellor of England at the same time.

The list of the rectors of this lovely old church, long in the diocese of Lincoln, reflects a strange phase of ecclesiastical history. The Pope, in 1240, demanded that the bishop should reserve 140 benefices for Italian clerics. The bishop protested stoutly, though unsuccessfully, for in 1269 one rector, Laurence de Burgh, succeeded a nameless rector who was a canon of St. Maria Rotonda. St. Maria Rotonda, of which this Hambleden incumbent, an Italian undoubtedly, was a canon, is the former Pantheon, the most perfect ancient building now extant in Rome. It became a temple of Jupiter and was rebuilt by the Emperor Hadrian. It is lighted solely by a hole in the centre of the magnificent coppered dome, and it now holds the tombs of Raphael and of the Kings of Italy.

This business of nominating Italian clerics to English livings was a profitable one for the thirteenth-century Popes. They sold the livings, not always to the best characters. The Bishop of Lincoln's protests were not heeded, and in one year alone he lost revenues out of his diocese amounting to £20,000. At two villages within five miles of Hambleden there were other Italian vicars, one, Vitalis, at Sonning, and one, Bello Deserto, at Shiplake. The Mass being in Latin, these Italian vicars were not embarrassed, but how much intercourse could they have had with their rude flocks ?

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The living at Hambleton came ultimately into the Scrope family. They held the Manor for some three hundred years, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, and had the appointment of nineteen rectors. Their old manor-house is now part of the present rectory, and in the church one can see on the Scrope brass their coat of arms with the Bend d'or, the golden band across it. It was this coat of arms which provoked a famous lawsuit between Sir Richard Scrope and Sir Richard Grosvenor.

One of the Scrope descendants became the Earl of Sunderland, and he is memorable for having built, in 1603, the noble manor-house that now stands a little way from the church, and where Charles I slept when a fugitive from Oxford.

Another great family were the D'Oyleys. In 1480 John D'Oyley bought Greenlands from Sir William Stonor. John's son, Robert, died at the Oxford Assizes, in 1577, from a plague that arose from the unsanitary condition of the gaol. As might be expected, our old friend Dr. Robert Plot knew all about it.

"Others again tell us of the Black Assize held in the Castle here in 1577, when a poyzenous steam broke forth of the earth, and so mortally seized the spirits of the Judges, Sheriffs, Justices, Gentry and Juries, besides great numbers of others that attended the business, that they sickened upon it and almost all of them dyed."

However, the learned doctor did not swallow local rumours. "But let it not be ascribed to ill fumes and exhalations ascending from the earth and poysoning the air, for such would have equally affected the

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Prisoners as Judges, but we find not that they died otherwise than by the halter, which easily persuades me to be of the mind of Lord Verulam, who attributes it wholly to the smell of the Gaol, where the prisoners had been long, close and nastily kept."

A later John D'Oyley owned Greenlands when it suffered a bombardment during the Civil War by the Parliamentary Army, and he was glad to sell the remains of it to his neighbour Bulstrode Whitlocke, of Fawley Court, whose house had suffered also, standing in between Greenlands and the Parliamentary garrison at Phyllis Court, Henley.

But let us return to the rectors, casting a grateful look at the tomb of Dr. Kenrick, for it was he who built the western front of the rectory, in 1725, fitting it on to the south corner of the Scropes' old manor-house. It is a lovely old house now, standing back on the hill-side. It has lost something of its ancient grandeur, but it has gained a setting of fine trees. According to a print of 1756, there were two colonnades of clipped yews, and it shows a milkmaid milking a cow, crinolined ladies and the learned doctor in college cap and gown disporting themselves in a meadow below the house, while along the road rolls a private coach-and-four with attendant lackey.

It is with the Reverend Henry Colborne Ridley and his parson son that we will linger. So much has been written to the detriment of clergymen, and they have so often well qualified themselves for cockshies, that it is pleasant to look on this servant of his flock. The manner in which Henry Ridley came to be the Rector of Hambleton was characteristic of the system that

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often inflicts on a parish an incumbent who is an encumbrance. Ridley's father-in-law, Lord Colborne of Bath, bought the living, which had to be 'held' for young Ridley until he was old enough to be instituted. When he arrived to his cure of souls he was a mere boy of twenty-five, who might have developed into a typical hunting parson. But he soon proved to be a young man of serious life. He believed all he preached, and he preached on every opportunity. He was perhaps a little surprised at himself. "When I consider this sort of life which I now have led for five years, and think how totally different it is to what I before had passed, I wonder to find it is so little irksome, but habit will reconcile us to any arrangement." Thus he wrote on March 26th, 1808, and then added, possibly with a sigh, "Tis true that now I would much prefer society."

A month later, after making parish visits, he writes more contentedly, casting no backward glances on the world of fashion.

"I have found a degree of society in my humble parishioners, far more agreeable to my taste than all the complimentary friendship of a fashionable world. . . . In point of variety I think my neighbours have the advantage. Their ideas are so different from those of an educated mind, that they will frequently amuse on account of their simplicity . . . and certainly with them what you advance is attended to. Whereas in a London assembly there seems now to be an apathy and absence in persons you converse with almost insupportable."

Poor young man, he had not quite won the battle,

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as a note on April 25th records : " I continued to take three or fours hours' exercise with my hoe and saw, so as to subdue my restless spirit. The Garden and the Greenhouse were a little encumbered with my presence."

At the manor-house young Mr. Ridley must have encountered a small boy, who was destined not only to succeed to the earldom of Cardigan but also to lead the charge at Balaclava.

Ridley was now getting into his stride, and when we read his little Handbill on Parochial Duties we must marvel at the activity, the unselfishness, and true piety of this servant of his Lord. The Hambleton Handbill had twenty headings, chronicling his various activities, ranging from Cottage Readings, and Loan of Child-bed Linen, to Vaccination. His Handbill was first published privately, and the good man was astonished at its reception. He " never expected that such a trifle would excite much notice." At the very beginning he laid down his conception of a parson's duties. He " should devote his whole time and strength to those services which he has chosen. A clergyman's family, house, occupations, and everything connected with him, should be consistent, and all family arrangements made subordinate to his parochial duties."

One may smile now at the keen, unwearying eye he kept on his flock. Woe to the evil-liver, the backslider, or the worldly who inhabited the village of Hambleton. One may think some of the announcements a little smug in these days, when we are so broad minded that it would often seem we have no minds to speak of. Mr. Ridley believed in black and

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in white. He believed in a Chosen People. "These quarterly meetings are intended to keep alive the spirit of charity towards unenlightened natures." Every penny he collected for the heathen at the missionary meeting was a testimony to his passionate conviction. He played on the imagination of the villagers with exhibits from the mission field. "Pomegranates, olives, dates, the Esquimaux' works, Moravian baskets, Indian bows and arrows, New Zealand dresses, idols, myrrh, aloes, and cassia or anything that can elucidate the subject" were produced. The parish room must have dazzled the villagers' eyes with these representative and alluring objects of heathen life.

He created a lending library, and expresses a pleasant surprise that will be shared by all librarians when he relates that "it is now upwards of twenty-three years since a parochial library was established, and some of the books then issued are still *in existence*."

Parson Ridley laid great stress on the frequent reading of the Scriptures. He visited every hamlet in the parish, reading here at eleven o'clock, there at one, or two or three o'clock, whenever and wherever it was possible to collect his flock. "No one but those accustomed to question the poor, or to be questioned by them, can form an idea of what, by way of explanation, they require," he observes. "It is not only line upon line, and precept upon precept they need, but it is almost word by word and letter by letter. . . . The time fixed in the Handbill is always punctually observed, and before the bell is rung the little flock may be observed preparing for the summons. The clergyman rings the bell himself."

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And they came. He would have eighty or ninety present at four cottages, and the distribution of loaves and fishes, or blankets and firewood, was not the sole or the first reason for their presence. One can feel now, from the pages of the yellowed Handbill, the glow of faith in the heart of the country parson. He had material to labour with, of course. The majority of his flock were poor and ignorant. To-day the majority of a parson's flock, in villages or hamlets, are neither poor nor ignorant. Some have spent their summer holidays on Lake Lucerne, or in Paris, and Uncle Bernard takes them out in his saloon car if they have not one of their own. "Do you often go to London?" I asked, sympathetically, of a village youth, one day. "No—I'm sick of it. I'm saving up for the Rhine in August," he replied. And too frequently the parson, so scandalous is the inequality of church livings, is patronised by his parishioners on the assumption that had he shown any ability he would have gone into business.

Parson Ridley had a comfortable private income, a comfortable living, and a most delightful rectory. He could have cut a figure in county society with a wife of good family and an engaging personality, but he preferred to walk all over his parish ringing a handbell and summoning to prayer. He was neither a fanatic nor a bigot. He believed in a God that took a personal interest in his work and his flock. He was practical and full of resource. They made lace in the village. He opened a school for lace-makers 'soon after evening school closes,' and seventy attended. "The Scallope Laces are all on the pillows at present. I

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suppose the fashion will last for a few months, but not longer," he records, and, alluding to a transaction, "I begged she would let the man have all the lace she had got at ten per cent. below what it is marked." When the girls were released from the pillows they were taught reading and writing.

It was an age when opportunities for education had to be snatched after long hours of labour. Boys left their schools at the age of ten and were working on the farm. There were over a hundred villagers attending the evening school organised by their parson. "When the days lengthen so as to call for their protracted labour in the field the School is closed. Their copy-books and pens are given to them on the last night, and generally a book is presented to each."

The females of Hambleden made bobbin lace, but Parson Ridley encouraged them to attend a sewing class to fit them for wifely duties. He took few risks with frail human nature, even in the Scripture reading class : "Females are allowed to occupy one of the rooms, and the men the other, the class table being placed in a wide doorway between the two rooms."

There was a supply of fuel for the poor at special low rates. There were nine distribution stations, and there was a yearly consumption of some 25,000 spokes : about 160 families were supplied. "Potatoes every Monday fortnight (for those who have not gardens) from nine to twelve o'clock at Hambleden, beginning December 1st," announced the Handbill. He seems to have thought of everything, and so one of the most important things, in an era when childbirth mortality was dreadfully high, did not escape his atten-

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tion and forethought. Any poor woman in the parish could have the use of a set of bed-linen for the month of the confinement. She was expected to return it clean. There was also in the bundle a bag of groats, a handbell—to summon assistance—a bottle of castor oil with the proper doses marked for mother and infant, half a pound of soap and a tract “connected with the subject of that mercy of which the poor woman has just partaken.”

Thus it was, on a summer or a winter’s day, one might have seen one of Parson Ridley’s bundles being carried into a cottage in anticipation of an interesting event, with the handbell jingling inside. Seven pairs of sheets and seven handbells met the requirements of the Hambleden birth-rate. The sheets were all of linen, each pair enclosed in a brown linen bag, and, if sent to an infected house, were well washed on being brought back. “The child-bed sets and sheets are always placed, on their return, within a moderately warm oven (after the brand has been drawn), and remain there one night,” says the Handbill.

The good parson overlooked nothing that could contribute to the welfare of his flock. He was as anxious about their bodies as their souls. He ran a clothing department and had a clothing room at the rectory, open on Monday mornings for females and on Saturday evenings for men. Being shrewd, he did not provide clothes for nothing. “Whatever they purchase is infinitely more valued by them than what they receive as a gift. It costs exertion to secure it and it is proportionately prized.”

His parish contained 245 houses and 1,350 inhab-

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itants. He knew every one of them. "I trotted on my everlasting supporters to Marlow to-day, and after three hours' employment returned tolerably stout. Indeed, though the day was disagreeable, yet it suited a pedestrian who does not disapprove of cold wind when he can walk at a lamplighter's pace." This, after a walk of twelve miles. Sometimes, he went farther abroad in a coach, but in 1817 the speed seemed dangerous. "The rapidity with which the coach travels is almost terrific," he records.

The care of his parishioners' bodies allowed good Parson Ridley to overlook no detail. He was an early convert to vaccination, and resolutely fought obstinate fears on the subject. He kept a medicine chest, and seemed to have some fame as a physician. "The medicine chest must be moved, as it is rather too powerful (on account of smell)," and on the subject of medical administration he observed, "It would be well if young persons devoted to the Ministry had some little knowledge of Surgery and Medicine . . . at all events it would seem more useful and not less interesting than Chemistry, and many other branches to which a large portion of academical time is devoted." As a visitor, whether in the capacity of divine or doctor, he had a shrewd wit. "I called on old Mr. Deane, whom I found as well as I wished and much better than others desired." Was Mrs. Deane also testy, or was it merely an allusion to the perpetual mistress *v.* servant suit that made the Parson observe: "To-morrow, Mary Munday starts for Parmore. I already hear that she dreads entering that service, and, indeed, I do not wonder at it!"

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No one, having read the Handbill, can walk the lanes and roads about Hambleden without a thought of this true man of God. But it is when I journey from Henley to Hambleden along the Marlow road that he comes more into mind, for I encounter a singular procession that he heads, psalm-book in hand. It is the Confirmation class proceeding to Henley to be confirmed by the Bishop.

The members of this slow procession have qualified after long attendance at Parson Ridley's preparatory classes. On the last Sunday they have been handed their commendatory tickets, and now the solemn day has arrived. They all meet at the schoolroom and then, whether old or young, walk two and two, attended by their shepherd. The distance to Henley is four miles, and for those who may grow faint by the wayside a wagon is provided. A strict watch is kept upon the pilgrims. They shall not be snatched en route by the Evil One. "They have some slight refreshment at a *private* house, and are never allowed to separate or disperse till they return home," records the Handbill. And so along the road they walk, in order, two by two, singing psalms both going and returning, with the attendant wagon in the rear.

I can see that solemn procession now, and of all the faces in it it is the face of the Reverend Henry Colborne Ridley that I look for. True, he has gone forever from the roads, trodden by his 'everlasting supporters' wrapped, in winter-time, so legend reports, in green baize puttees, holding a Bible in one hand, a handbell in the other. He died at the early age of fifty-three, perhaps worn out by his earnest labour, but shadows

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though we are, he is a vivid figure in the Hambleden parish one hundred years after his death, so truly does the good that men do live after them.

III

Parson Ridley even provided for the carrying on of his work, and in his son, William Henry Ridley, Hambleden found another devoted servant of God. I have frequently heard it said that the sons of country parsons are invariably rakes, the implication being that they are a reaction from an atmosphere of godliness. But is the charge borne out by the facts? It seems to me that our country parsons have produced a higher percentage of men of genius, of gifted men devoted to public service, than any other calling. It is not often that a parson's son enters the Church. He has had plenty of evidence, like Goldsmith, of a calling where they are 'passing rich on forty pounds a year,' for gone, in this age of depleted tithes, are many of those fat thousand-a-year livings. I know a parson who has contrived, on a salary of three hundred a year, to send two sons to Oxford, God knows how, though part of the explanation is seen in his wife, who scurries to the front door out of the kitchen, wiping her hand en route; and in the vicar's trousers, which shine like a looking-glass as he mounts his bicycle.

Young William Henry Ridley was only sixteen when his father died, and again the living had to be 'kept' for the time until he was ordained. Here again seems another instance of the absurd system of family livings which inflicts upon a parish the nit-wit son or the poor,

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incompetent relation of the patron. But here the system worked beneficially again, in keeping a Ridley in the rectory. William had inherited all the zeal of his father, with a little of the Evangelical drive of the Oxford Movement behind him. He became rector in 1840, and again every cottage door was shadowed by the parson : the night-schools, the cottage readings, the various institutions created by his father, all felt his guiding hand. He rose every morning at six, until he was a sick man, and during a long illness he found consolation in the services of the Church, praying for each household in the parish, which he divided so as to have a rota for each day of the week. His clerk reported how, during Lent, Ridley would sleep downstairs in order that the shepherd, going to his work at 4 a.m., might wake him for extra devotions : the study carpet was worn where he used to kneel for prayers.

He died after forty-two years of service, and the popularity of this praying parson may be judged from the fact that on his return to Hambleden, after a convalescence, the villagers put up triumphal arches, decorated all the houses with flowers and banners, and on the arrival of the carriage at the first arch, took the horses out of the shaft and drew it into the middle of the village. One can stand now in that pleasant open space, with the church as a background, and with the old red-roofed flint and brick houses rising towards the rectory, and reconstruct the scene.

“ Mr. Weal, the minister’s churchwarden, mounted on a platform, read an appropriate address prepared for the purpose, which was kindly responded to by Mr. Ridley : after which the schoolchildren sang some

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verses composed by Mr. and Mrs. Crook, the school-master and mistress : this done, the men, with Herculean strength, drew the carriage up the hill to the front of the rectory, where they gave them many hearty cheers of welcome, and the children sang more verses from the above composers."

We may smile in our sophistication, but here is another aspect of the parson-ridden legend. To-day artificial-silk stockings and cheap flannel trousers drape limbs once clad in the crinoline and the smock. The youth of the village mount motor-cycles and rush off to the nearest town cinema, while Grandpa listens in to the jazz band. In Parson Ridley's day even the Henley Fair was thought "an unwholesome attraction," and to counteract it he instituted the Hambleton Fair and the Flower Show. They have both ceased to exist. What would Parson Ridley make of mine hostess of *The Stag and Huntsman*, who, slim, bobbed-haired, and dressed in riding-breeches, on the morning I called, popped into her roaring sports car to do some shopping in Reading ?

It would, I think, please both the Ridleys, however, to see their old church now. It is an excellent example of what a well-kept village church should be when the Lord of the Manor has a deep pocket, and the will to put his hand in it. It was built in about A.D. 1140, and is Norman in style : but the old tower disappeared in 1707, being unsafe, and the new tower, a characteristic example of Chiltern brick and flint work, appeared at the west end some ten years after the first tower had disappeared from the centre. Drastic alterations have changed and enlarged the church. The farm

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labourers always occupied the gallery, until later times, and it is said the farmers stood in the porch on a Sunday morning to see that their men went up to the gallery.

An object of interest within is Wolsey's Bedstead. Whether Wolsey ever slept in it is not known, and anyhow it is only the head and foot of a bedstead, bought and fixed on the back of a vestry cupboard by William Henry Ridley. What is undeniable is that it is finely carved, and bears the arms of Cardinal Wolsey and Richard Fox, both Bishops of Winchester in the sixteenth century.

In the neighbouring village of Fingest the Bishop of Lincoln had a manor-house, and for almost a year Wolsey was Bishop of Lincoln. That seems enough to bring the bedstead near to Hambleden, and without a doubt it contains the arms and the initials of Wolsey and Fox. Considering the number of saints' tongues, toes, and bones we accept as relics in the Roman Catholic churches, we may allow the Anglican church the bedstead of Wolsey, for it is beautiful and not merely gruesome.

We must look also at the fine alabaster tomb of Sir Cope D'Oyley and his wife and ten children, with an epitaph by Quarles, the poet, to the knight's wife, his sister. We need not believe that she was

*in spirit a Jael,
Rebecca in grace, in heart an Abigail,
In works a Dorcas, to ye church a Hanna,
And to her spouse Susanna,
Prudently simple, providently wary,
To the world a Martha and to Heaven a Mary,*

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but we must applaud the nicely balanced family of five sons and five daughters she found time to bear while exercising so many virtues.

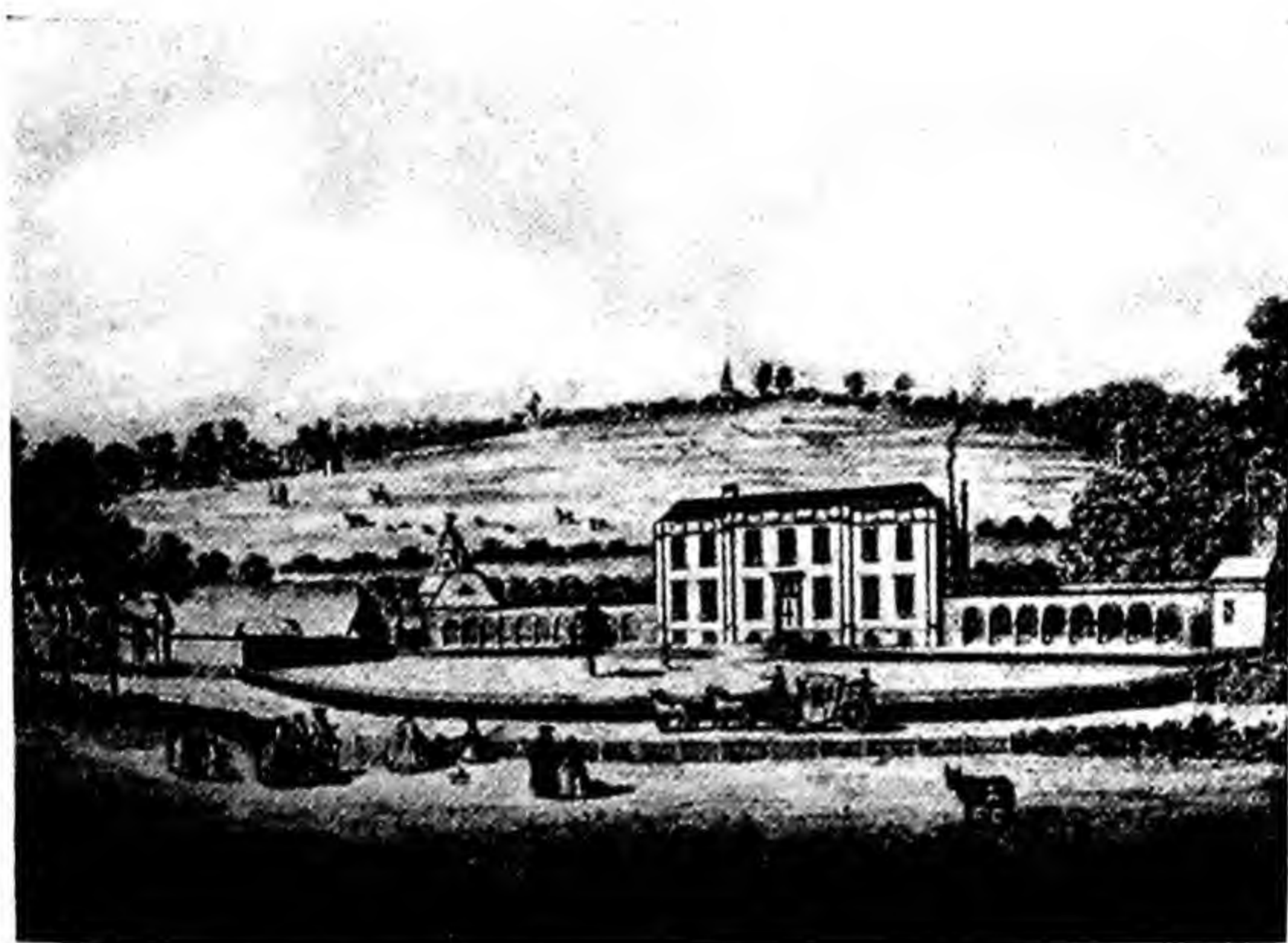
Let us now go over to Fingest to look at a saddle-back Norman church, and call on a ghost in holy orders. But before departing we will glance at the Hambleden village War Memorial, finely wrought and placed before the churchyard wall. It has forty names on its stone base, and of those forty names it contains those of five pairs of brothers, such was the toll of English village life.

*The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.*

Two and a half miles up the Hambleden valley we find Fingest, with its odd twelfth-century tower, with four-feet-thick walls and twin red-brick gables. But it is the ghost of the Bishop of Lincoln that we are thinking of while in this distressingly bare church. The diocese of Lincoln once embraced the Chilterns, and the Bishops had a palace at Fingest. One of these, Henry de Burghersh, who died in 1340, obtained a licence to empark his wood with three hundred acres of common land adjoining, to the great indignation of the inhabitants. He died soon after, and his ghost appeared to one of his gentlemen, attired in a keeper's dress. He was doomed as a penance for his encroachment to act as keeper until restoration was made. He begged the Canons of Lincoln to break down the

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hedges and fill up the ditches, which they did, and his ghost was laid. All moonshine, probably, and yet—the tax assessment records show that the Bishop did enclose the land, and traces of a high bank and ditches were to be seen until the eighteenth century.



THE PARSONAGE, HAMBLEDEN.

IN THE NIGHT

*How hushed the garden now the moon
Comes round the gable of the house,
The soft enchantment grows and soon
Will flood with light the pear-tree boughs.*

*Within the dark, uncurtained room
A blade of silver stabs the floor,
The china princess through the gloom
Smiles on the moonstruck blackamoor.*

*Within his cage the budgerigar
Opens a jet-black eye and listens,
While Nelson dies at Trafalgar,
Upon the wall ; the blue jar glistens,*

*The French clock made in Avignon
Wheezes and strikes the hour of three,
The old house settles ; the night, half gone,
Brushes the moon with the poplar tree.*

*Now shows the dormer window wide
A cavern dark, with vine leaves fringed,
And in the East the refluent tide
Of day comes back, with crimson tinged.*

CHAPTER V

OF COURTESAN AND CARDINAL

I

THE house-boats that once lined the Thames have gone. It used to be the pastime of millionaires and others to keep house-boats *de luxe* on the Thames above Maidenhead. They moved up to Henley for the Regatta, and it is within memory that they lined the course for over a mile. The motor-car, extending the week-end habit, has killed the house-boat. It is cheaper to stay at the wayside inn than to keep a house-boat moored to a bank. Some of these boats often carried a staff of five or six servants and cost as much as ten thousand pounds. In addition, they often had an ornamental garden on the bank behind, which resulted in a gardener being kept and rates being paid. House-boats will soon be such rare things that we shall have to study the Oxford college 'barges' lined along the Isis to know what they were like.

The house-boats have gone, the State barges went long before. From the time of Queen Elizabeth until the reign of George the Fourth there was an 'Office of the Royal Barges' administered under the Lord Chamberlain, and it was no sinecure. The river was used by Royalty and public notabilities from Henley down to Gravesend, for the nobility and the gentry

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went by water whenever possible. The roads were often impassable, and even as late as 1798 the Oxford road through Uxbridge had only one track, less than six feet wide, which was often eight inches deep in fluid mud, and men were employed to 'scoop out the batter.' Some of the turnpikes were stretches of ruts and holes, and a traveller at Northampton once found troops stationed there to prevent the indignant public from rising and cutting down the toll-gates.

It was the river as a highway that made the journey from London to Henley so popular, and caused the great houses of the nobility to be erected within sight of its banks. And just as to-day men spend large sums on their automobiles, as once on their coaches, so they spared no expense on their barges. They had magnificent tilts, embroidered cloths, carpets, streamers, and curtains.

The King kept a Master and forty-eight Watermen-in-Ordinary, the Queen a Master and twenty-four watermen, and a Queen-Dowager and a Queen Divorced were entitled to a Master and twelve watermen. These men wore elaborate liveries and badges, and they moved the Court from one Palace to another. London was essentially a riverside town. Royalty passed from Whitehall to Greenwich, or up to Hampton Court. All the great dukes and earls had their town houses, if possible with a water-gate, and even as late as the time of Canaletto we can see, in one of his delightful paintings, the extent of the traffic on the Thames at London. In the reign of Richard II, there were river traffic blocks, and a special ordinance was drawn up to regulate the usage of the river. To take

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over the many functions, the control of navigation, the maintenance of beacons, buoys, and lamps, the Brethren of Trinity House came into existence. They were authorised to meet Royalty and Ambassadors on their arrival at Gravesend and to escort them in richly decorated barges up the river to London.

The journeys above London were more often for pleasure than business, and the Court naturally proceeded along the pleasantest way, between the banks of the river winding through Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. I go to Pilgrim Cottage from London, some thirty-seven miles, by motor-car. I have also gone by rail, by motor-coach, and by water. By boat is now the longest way, in point of distance and time, but in summer it is still the loveliest and the quietest route. There was a time when the water route triumphed over the coach route. The first stage coach on record, with four horses, ran between London and Oxford. Its first journey was made in March 1643. It tried to open traffic along the Uxbridge road to Oxford, but after two and a half journeys the coach broke down, unable to withstand the obstacles it encountered, and the River Thames route flourished, as ever.

Members of Parliament went to the Commons by barge, members of the House of Lords often went to the Tower by barge, on their last journey. The favourite mode of transit was to go on horseback from inn to inn until the river could be struck. This method accounts for many seemingly strange journeys. Nell Gwynne, for instance, is said—without any real proof—to have lived in a small house overlooking the

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river at Medmenham, and at Soundess, near Nettlebed, where to this day one may see her 'bower,' an enclosure of yews, and the well down which she is said to have dropped some jewels, again without any proof. The lady's visit to Soundess rests on no traceable foundation, though the house itself has one of the strongest foundations I have ever seen, walls four feet thick, and long tunnels of splendid brickwork. Yet I would not swear naughty, sporty Nell had never been there. She was not far from the river route that sovereigns favoured, and Charles II, like other husbands, could easily find business to keep him away for a night or two, and drop in on his way to or from Oxford.

For nearly three hundred years the local inhabitants have been looking down Nell's well in the hope of finding something there, the story being that she flung her jewels down it, apprehensive of approaching robbers. As for her sojourn at the house, the Ordnance Survey has bowed to local tradition and put Nell Gwynne's Bower and Soundess House on the map in the German type which indicates buildings and places from A.D. 420 to 1688. Nell became the King's mistress, or one of them, about 1670. "Good folks, I am the Protestant whore!" she said, popping her head out of the coach menaced by a mob that thought it contained the unpopular Duchess of Portsmouth, Charles's French mistress, which frank wit brought her a cheer. She was dead by 1687. From this one narrows down the Soundess sojourn to between 1670-80. Throughout this time Soundess was the property of the Taverners, so she could only have been a tenant,

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and if the Taverners were as pious as their memorials in Nettlebed church declare—

*Ask not me who's buried here,
Goe ask ye commons, ask ye shere,
Goe ask ye Church ; they tell ye who
As well as blubbered eyes can doe*

so wrote a Taverner memorialist, stealing boldly from the D'Oyley monument at Hambleden—then it was singular they should have as a tenant a ‘light lady,’ whom her neighbours could not possibly call on. Or could they?—for a lightness with Majesty led often to ducal coronets, and in ‘poor Nellie’s’ case to a funeral sermon by a future Archbishop of Canterbury, in which he said much to her praise. And how firmly entrenched she is in English affections! I was nearly thrown out of a Nettlebed inn for daring to suggest that she had never seen Soundess. She is claimed as a ‘local’ with a fervour that no patron saint could invoke.

“I’ve heard my old grandad a-say he heard of folks that had seen her—and a pretty lady a-riding her horse of a morning she was!”

“She rode about here?” I asked, as calmly as I could in the presence of living history.

My informant fixed a burning eye upon me, and the whole taproom listened in respectful silence.

“She *rode*, sir, and there’s a ditch, down by Pages Bottom, that was her morning jump, and she ’ad a blue feather in ’er ’at and a diamond brooch on her bosom a-placed there by King Charles ’isself, who was

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a-crazed of her. That's no gossip, that's gospel truth, I'm telling you, from me grandad, a churchwarden. If you don't believe me, ask the General who employed my grandad till he died at ninety-one. He'll tell you, sir."

"Have another whisky? General who——?" I asked.

"General Mervyn-Morpeth of Pages Bottom."

So the General was mixed up in the story. Meeting the P.M. a day or two later, I mentioned Nell Gwynne and the old man who knew folks who saw the brooch on her bosom. The levity with which I spoke was checked at once. For a moment I glimpsed the cavalry eye, the whiskers blew out.

"I see no reason whatever to doubt the fact. None at all, sir! I employed old Grant, and the tradition in his family that Nell Gwynne rode about with a blue feather in her hat and a brooch on her bosom was quite unshakable. And why shouldn't she have had a feather in her hat, and a brooch on her lovely bosom—a lovely brooch on her bosom?" corrected the General. "She had to show herself somewhere, eh?"

"Of course," I agreed, conscious that the General was ready to make his belief a matter of honour.

"People are much too sceptical these days. They'll distrust the word of a grand old man like Grant—four hundred years on the soil here, his family was—and yet take the word of Lloyd George. Don't understand it!"

Neither did I, but when the name of Lloyd George comes forth from the General it is a sure sign of battle. I retreated at once.

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So let us accept the Ordnance Survey, the General, and Mr. Grant in the *Bull* taproom. Nell came to Soundess by boat up the Thames to Henley, perhaps from Windsor, and made the rest of the journey on horseback, maybe with the blue feather and the brooch.

Certainly Queen Henrietta Maria, Charles the First's Queen, spent much time on the river, and according to the Royal account books of the period, the Court, after the Coronation ceremonies, lived for weeks on the water, making excursions. The Queen brought with her a large French following that delighted in the Thames. It became the mode. The nobility flocked over from Versailles, headed by the Duc and Duchesse de Chevreuse, and there were lavish entertainments, water fêtes, and instrumental music on the State barges. King Charles and his Queen, from 1628 to 1640, moved regularly from river-seat to river-seat, from Whitehall to Oatlands and Hampton Court, from Greenwich, Twickenham, Richmond, and Syon. The King opened his last Parliament on November 3rd, 1640, before his break with the Commons, and he made the journey there in a magnificent new State barge, which Parliament sold eleven years later for six hundred pounds.

Oliver Cromwell did not disdain a barge of State, and all his watermen were attired in splendid liveries, and bore silver-gilt badges with the letters O. P.—Oliver, Protector. He had ambassadors carried to Windsor Castle, where he received them, in his own State barges, although the Office of the Royal Barge had been suppressed.

The waters of the Thames have seen several

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gondolas. There was one kept for some years at Park Place, the former home of Prince Frederick of Wales, and of General Conway and his Countess, and I actually met an old gondolier in Venice who spoke affectionately and sadly of the days when the Noble family at Park Place had imported him to row a gondola on Henley waters. He did not know that the Serene Republic had once sent one of its own gondolas for service on the Thames. This was the gondola presented by the Doge of Venice to Charles II. Later it was used, though seldom, by Queen Anne when still a princess. Queen Mary, her sister, denied her a State barge or watermen, jealous of the fact that she was heir apparent to the Crown, and gave her their uncle's gondola !

When we go to visit the Stonors at Stonor House we shall see how much carrying was done by water for that family, established in the valley where I live. It was a highway that made Henley important. A few commercial barges can be seen occasionally now, and after diligent searching, a house-boat, the paint peeling, its whole appearance somewhat forlorn, may be found moored to one of the banks. Henley Regatta revives for a short four days a little of the former fashion and gaiety, after which the river resumes its tranquil aspect. Sometimes on Henley Bridge I pause. Whichever way one looks, upstream or downstream, it has an English beauty, of rich meadow, and of hills whose densely wooded slopes are broken here and there by stately houses. Along the bank itself we have already halted at Phyllis Court, and Greenlands, and by Hambleton Weir. Farther downstream, within the next six miles

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we come to Medmenham, Hurley, Bisham, and Marlow. This six-mile course is a pageant of English history, with old abbeys and houses inhabited by figures who still seem to move on the scene they once dominated, and by a couple of well-authenticated ghosts whose acquaintance we must make.

But we cannot go down to the river yet. While at Hambleden we are so near to Bockmer that we must visit it.

II

Bockmer scarcely exists. I first heard of it from Mrs. Gallop. That is not her real name, but as I do not want people competing for her friendship, I give her that fitting pseudonym. I first saw her as I was shaving at my bedroom window. She wore a bowler hat, a black riding-habit, and sat astride, a neat little woman of forty or fifty. She was fickle with her riding companions, at least so it seemed to me, for one morning she would ride by with a pair of pigtailed little girls, very neat and charming to look at, or with a thin young man with a high complexion, or with a thick-set old man, weather-beaten and horsey-voiced. I noticed her regularly, for she was an all-weather rider and went by every morning at shaving-time—a mid-morning hour for one who gardens before his bath.

Then, one morning, her cheery voice came across the bright air as she announced to a couple of mounted maidens, not long emerged from the 'finisher's'—
"There, that's Pilgrim Cottage!"

That sentence often floats in at my windows, since

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I have been rather reckless about its location and rather intimate about its characteristics, and sometimes the voice has the intonation of the zoo visitor. But this was a cheery voice, belonging to a woman who enjoyed life. I liked her, distantly, and for two years we never met. Mrs. Gallop remained a gallop at shaving-time, and I saw her only over the hawthorn breaking into leaf, or beyond the lilac in purple blossom, or through a spray of dog-rose petals—black bowler hat moving jerkily above a flowery screen. Round by my lane she came, and was gone, with a chuff-chuff of hooves on the dust track that connects my two roads.

We met at last. Someone took me for a drink to a boat-house overlooking the river. Now, for no reason at all, I had entertained an unspoken prejudice against boat-houses and the people who lived in them. They were lovely in summer, for a month or so, with their long balconies gay with geraniums and daisies. But they all had a dank, boaty underworld, of sunless water, snaky ropes, and sinister lifebuoys. This lugubrious underworld was in great contrast to the upper structure, for these balconies at week-ends seemed burdened with noisy people, all with glasses in their hands, all intolerably friendly. For two years I had avoided boat-houses, even at Regatta time, when the view down the river, over the heads of the boat crush, gave one a pleasant feeling of Olympian detachment.

So I was shanghaied for my drink and wriggled in the coils of my prejudices. We walked down the backs of a line of boat-houses, like the sterns of dry-docked ships, passed through an arch, and stood in the watery, boaty foundations whence a staircase rose to the upper

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This was a pleasant surprise. Her hair cut short on a neat head gave her a boyish gaiety. Her manner was cordial without being familiar, and when she greeted me with a compliment I knew it was from the heart, a good heart.

"Go in and sit down, I'm just off to my bath—no, come along in, I'll introduce you."

Inside were the Misses Twin-pigtails, the undoubted Major, ruddy-cheeked and loud-checked, a tall, shy youth in leggings like stilts, and three or four young women. The sitting-room was large and comfortable, the view from the outside balcony was superb, with the Fawley hills rising at the extreme end of the silver river downstream, and Henley Bridge, with its arches reflected in the river, upstream. The sherry decanter and the cocktail-shaker went round. Mrs. Gallop disappeared to her bath, and reappeared fresh and smiling. Here, I told myself, was a woman who had a great capacity for enjoyment. The company was kept moving, Mrs. Gallop kept biscuit-barrel, bonbon-box, and decanter adroitly circulating. I began to have a new idea of life in a boat-house. I found she read, she rode, she was alert to the loveliness through which she moved, and she liked company.

And how she walked, as well as rode! She knew the country-side, and often after that I met her on windy days and wet ones. I met her emerging from October mists, ever accompanied by the curly-headed

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James, the Airedale, whose life in a boat-house was one long tantalisation, because, having a 'heart,' he was forbidden to swim. So while the human race fell in and out of the summer stream, James whimpered and shook with excitement on the landing-stage. He had his bronchial days also, and would appear with his four strong legs through a woolly vest that had undoubtedly been worn by his mistress.

When Mrs. Gallop said I must go to Bockmer I asked why. "It's very old and you'd find out quite a lot about it." My curiosity aroused, she produced a friend, an intelligent firm-handed woman who could walk into a field and snaffle a stallion and who knew every inch of her home soil. But we did not get to Bockmer—we got to Burrow, which consisted of one old Tudor house at the end of a mile-long cart-track. I was excited about Burrow. It had stone mullion windows, great Tudor fireplaces, a glorious centre-post winding staircase, good rooms, a good roof, and had just been set in order by a rich peer's architect. It was to let, and, as ever, I began to wonder whether to take it. True it had no services of any kind, but if, as report said, it had been an early manor-house of the D'Oyleys, then I could surely manage somehow.

"What, leave Pilgrim Cottage!" protested Mrs. Gallop.

I explained that I was always about to live in a new house until serious investigation always emphasised the advantages of my own. It was a symptom of no real significance.

But here was a really old, really clean, newly-repaired empty Tudor house. I rushed to the window

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to get the magnificent view, and found it had none : it looked into a disused farmyard. Beyond, not two hundred yards away, rose a hill just high enough to block a panorama of the Thames valley. I knew then I could not live in that delightful old house. I should always be wanting to remove the hill opposite.

Since we did not get to Bockmer that day, we tried again. This time it led us to another old house, perched like a Rhineland castle, which I still covet ; and so nothing more shall be said of it. A third time I tried to get to Bockmer, only to find that the single road was closed to traffic. Water pipes were being laid.

A week later I tried from another side to get to Bockmer, and this time ended by being completely lost on roads that ran through such wooded beauty that I scarcely counted the miles I was motoring. ' To Marlow Common ' ran a sign on the edge of an enchanted wood. But how came Marlow Common to be so far from Marlow ? And what had happened in ' King's Hanging Wood ' and ' Rogues' Plantation ' ? Was one the result of the other ? I wound in and out, went up and down. A farmhouse loomed up. In front of it a man with one leg was talking to a boy in a baker's van.

" Is this Bockmer ? " I called out, scanning the old house, the garden, the gentle pastoral scene.

" No, it's Rotton Row," answered the man with one leg.

Rotton Row ! Shades of Hyde Park ! Why hadn't Mrs. Gallop brought me here ? But why Rotton Row, and why, poor man, that wooden leg ?

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"The war?" I asked, sympathetically, as he offered me a cigarette with a friendly gesture. He might have been a captain around 1914-1918.

A curious satirical smile hovered over his face.

"No, I went through the war on two legs. I lost it two months ago."

"Two months ago? But how, if you don't mind telling me?"

He didn't mind telling me, and as the story was unfolded the fellow's stoicism and pluck set me again wondering at the nature of man. He had been down by a covert with a shooting party. A youngster had let off a gun, which caught him in the leg. A self-improvised tourniquet stopped him bleeding to death before they got him to a hospital, where the leg had to be amputated.

"You're amazingly cheerful—how long have you been about?" I asked.

"A week—it's a bit difficult at first. You see, I've just retired from business and had planned to do a little farming here—and it all wants some adjusting."

He flicked the ash off his cigarette. "It's quiet here."

"Very quiet," I agreed.

There was nothing more one could say.

"Bockmer's down there—you can just see the roof," he said.

"Thank you." I started the car. "Good day."

"Good day."

It was growing dark, moreover I felt in no mood for Bockmer, whose existence I had begun to doubt. All the way home I was wondering what it was like

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to lose one's leg in the forties, when one had retired and looked forward to a quiet sporting life, with a little farming as a sideline.

III

I found Bockmer at last, by walking to it through daintily-named Damaskfield Wood—that divided it from Burrow. There is little to see but much to ruminate over. Bockmer is now a farmhouse, and retains only a few vestiges of its former importance. It was originally the house of the Manor of Medmenham. It existed at the time of the Domesday Survey and seems to have been in continuous occupation until it came into the hands of one, Geoffrey Pole, who restored and rebuilt it. It is this connection of the Pole family with Bockmer that made me curious to see the place. Sir Richard Pole, Geoffrey's elder son, had royal blood and was Squire of the Bodyguard to Henry VII. He became a great favourite of the King, was created a Knight of the Garter, and married Lady Margaret Plantagenet, daughter of the Duke of Clarence. With her husband she resided for some time at Bockmer. In her veins she had royal blood, and the King, by marrying her to Sir Richard, had adroitly disposed of the claim to the throne of his rivals the Plantagenets.

They had three sons, Henry, Reginald, and Geoffrey, and two daughters. Sir Richard died in 1505 and Lady Margaret was left to battle alone. Her whole life was encompassed by tragedy. Her father had been beheaded, her only brother, the Earl of Warwick, had been beheaded. Her son Henry was to die under the axe at Tower Hill, she was fated to die thus herself.

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By the irony of things, the one who jeopardised his head the most, and defied the most powerful and turbulent king in British history, Henry VIII, escaped the scaffold. This was Reginald Pole, destined to become a king's favourite, an exile with a price on his head, a Cardinal, and an Archbishop of Canterbury.

When Henry VIII came to the throne he seemed eager to undo the wrongs his father had visited upon the unhappy Lady Margaret. He gave her an annuity, he created her the Countess of Salisbury, and he returned to her the family estates. Her son Henry was restored to his Manor of Medmenham, was knighted, and enriched by several properties.

The Pole family fortunes were in the ascendant. Nor was young Reginald overlooked. The King paid his school fees, twelve pounds a year, an equivalent of two hundred and forty pounds to-day. Young Pole entered Magdalen College as a nobleman, and he seems to have had his own little court of poor but well-born youths. At eighteen he was given the Deanery of Wimborne Minster, in the scandalous manner of the times. At twenty he expressed a wish to go to Italy to complete his education. He was already regarded as a prodigy of learning. Henry VIII felt kindly towards his brilliant young kinsman and made him a present of one hundred pounds (two thousand pounds) for the cost of his tour. Like a prince, young Pole set forth for Italy, to study at Padua.

What a scene the city presented in 1519, when he first looked upon it! The paintings of Giotto and Mantegna, the sculptures of Donatello, and the Church

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of St. Anthony, were visible in all their fresh beauty. The city was devoted to the drama, to rich masquerades and carnivals. It was the university town of the great Venetian Republic, standing on the apex of an era of intellectual and artistic achievement.

The King of England's kinsman, as Pole was termed, rapidly established his reputation for learning and princely bearing. He was made welcome at the house of the scholar, Pietro Bembo. The early opinion of this great figure of the age was expressed in a letter to Cardinal Chigi. He found Pole to be "the most virtuous, learned, and serious youth who may perhaps this day be found in Italy."

The friendship between young Pole and the great humanist and poet was soon soundly established.

Eight happy years of young Pole's life slipped by. In 1525 the King and Pole's mother were anxious for him to return home, but it was Jubilee year in Rome and he obtained permission to go there. He came home in 1527 and was well received by King Henry VIII and Queen Catharine. A testing time soon came for him. Henry grew tired of the Queen. He offered Pole the Archbishopric of York as the price of supporting his divorce petition. He refused, to the alarm of all members of his family. Two years later he took refuge in Italy and openly attacked his cousin the King in a book he published.

Henry did not strike at once; he even extended a courteous invitation to Pole to return to England, which was wisely declined, and, when the Pope proceeded to excommunicate the King, the hand of Reginald Pole, who had been created a Cardinal, was seen in it. Yet

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the red hat had been forced upon him, and he was well aware of the jeopardy in which his relations would be placed. In vain he protested his friendship with the King. The evil minister of Henry, Thomas Cromwell, was moving against him. He had marked down the Pole family for destruction. In 1537 Reginald Pole was declared a traitor, with a price of fifty thousand crowns on his head. Attempts were made to do away with him, but Pole bore a charmed life, and all the plots failed.

He was spending the summer at Venice in the company of Bembo and other scholars when he heard that his brother, Sir Geoffrey, had been sent to the Tower. His eldest brother, Henry, Lord Montacute, was convicted of treason and beheaded. The family estate, including Bockmer and the Manor of Medmenham, was seized by the Crown. Sir Geoffrey, a timid creature, not very strong in the head, was charged with having corresponded with his brother without showing his letters to the King. For nearly two months he was terrorised, and after seven examinations and fifty-nine interrogatories, with promises of pardon and threats of the rack, the wretched victim allowed accusations against Reginald de la Pole and others to be extorted from him. He accused himself as well as his relations and "confessed he liked well the proceedings of his brother the Cardinal." A servant of Sir Geoffrey's was produced who admitted he had been sent overseas with a letter warning the Cardinal of designs against his life. Sir Geoffrey was finally released, but in such misery of mind that he attempted suicide on three occasions.

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Liberty was dead in England : Henry VIII's hound, Thomas Cromwell, rounded up his victims. Every means was tried to get at Cardinal Pole, and we find even that pleasant poet, Sir Thomas Wyatt, who wrote such charming little lines to his mistress, stooped, in the rôle of Ambassador to Venice, to connive at murder. King Henry, unable to reach Pole, wrought vengeance on his mother, the countess, and threw her into the Tower. It was a neat plan of Cromwell's and served a double purpose, for it removed a Plantagenet from the possible succession. The Countess of Salisbury was condemned to death, and the sentence was suspended over her head for two years before it was carried out.

"You have heard," wrote Pole, "of my mother being condemned to death by public council, or rather, to eternal life. Not only has he who condemned her condemned a woman of seventy, than whom he has no nearer relation except his daughter, and of whom he used to say there was no holier woman in his kingdom ; but at the same time her grandson, son of my brother, a child, the remaining hope of our race."

Her execution took place on May 27th, 1541. Lord Herbert of Cherbury described the unhappy countess vainly refusing to lay her head on the block and being chased round by the executioner, sword in hand. She was beheaded at seven in the morning in a corner of the Tower, with no crowd to witness the monstrous scene. The event did not leak out till evening. Chapuys, the Ambassador of the Queen-Regent of Flanders, wrote :

"When informed of her sentence, she found it very strange, not knowing her crime ; but she walked to the

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place in front of the Tower, where there was no scaffold, but only a small block. She there commended her soul to God, and desired those present to pray for the King, Queen, Prince and Princess. The ordinary executioner being absent, a blundering youth, *garçonneau*, was chosen, who hacked her head and shoulders almost to pieces. . . . When her death was resolved upon, her grandson, the son of Lord Montacute, who had been allowed occasionally to go about within the Tower, was more strictly guarded. It is to be supposed that he will follow his father and grandmother."

The unhappy boy's history closes there. He was then fifteen or sixteen, and he is coupled, in an ominous note of Cromwell's, with another child prisoner, Edward Courtenay—"To remember the two children in the Tower."

Did this monster remember? When Queen Mary came to the throne and released the Tower prisoners, only one of the two children, Courtenay, now a grown man, came forth. Henry had used the word 'exterminate' with reference to the Pole family. Had there been another early morning execution, more secret and hasty? This boy Henry was the last hope of the family, and of the White Rose. Cromwell seems to have done his dastardly work thoroughly.

In 1549 Pole came within two votes of the Papal throne, and so certain were some of the Cardinals of his election that they visited Pole in his cell, to announce his election, and offer 'adoration.' But Pole would not assent to an election by night, telling them it should be made in the morning, after Mass. The next morning his votes had fallen, and the arrival of six French

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Cardinals turned the balance in favour of Cardinal Caraffa, who was elected. Pole's own version of that nocturnal offer is characteristic of the integrity of his character.

"When the two Cardinals came to my cell to proffer 'adoration' I thought of the two disciples whom our Lord sent to fetch the ass, on which he meant to ride into the Holy City. So I listened to them . . . and would not have denied them, but for the night-time and its darkness. Was I right or not? I make no disputation, save that I could have no part in anything which night and darkness might render suspect. . . . Then came other two, with the same authority, to show that they were not asking anything of me not customary and unlawful, but just. . . . Yet I prayed them to wait, and leave the issue to be proved by daylight. . . . And, as the event proved, the Lord did not require this particular ass."

Henry VIII died, Edward VI followed, then Queen Mary came to the throne. The Catholic Faith was restored, and the attainder against Cardinal Pole reversed. He was invited to England, and, proceeding by barge from Gravesend to Westminster, was met on the steps of the Palace by Philip of Spain, the Queen's husband, and led to the Queen, who, making obeisance, embraced and kissed the exile. He took up his residence at Lambeth Palace, in frail health, with an immense task before him. The strange thing is that all this time the Cardinal was not a priest, being in minor orders only, and before he could be consecrated as Archbishop of Canterbury he had to be ordained. The necessary ceremonies were gone through and he

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ascended the archiepiscopal throne. His triumph was overshadowed by the burning of Cranmer the previous day. This monstrous act preluded the storm. The fires of Smithfield had begun to burn and religious fanaticism and bigotry were doing their ghastly work. The plots for the placing of Elizabeth on the throne spread and public feeling turned against the Queen. A false rumour that she was pregnant had dashed the nation's hopes, the Spanish husband was hated, and the retiring Venetian Ambassador reported to the Doge and Senate of Venice that "what disquiets the Queen most is to see the eyes and hearts of the people already fixed on this lady (Elizabeth) as successor to the Crown."

The Queen was already dying of dropsy, the disease which had accounted for the false hopes of childbirth. Pole was also stricken. Thirty years ago, Queen Catharine of Aragon and Pole's mother, Margaret Plantagenet, had entertained high hopes of a marriage between the woman who was now Queen and the man who was her spiritual adviser and Papal Legate. That hope of joining the White Rose and the Red had never been realised. And now, after eventful years, they seemed to be united in death. When the news of the Queen's plight came to Pole he was on his own death-bed, but he summoned strength to write to her. She died on November 17th, 1558, and the news was broken to the Cardinal in the evening.

"He desired that the book containing the prayers for the dying might be placed near him. He then had Vespers said as usual . . . in fine, it was evident that, as in health, that sainted soul was ever turned towards God."

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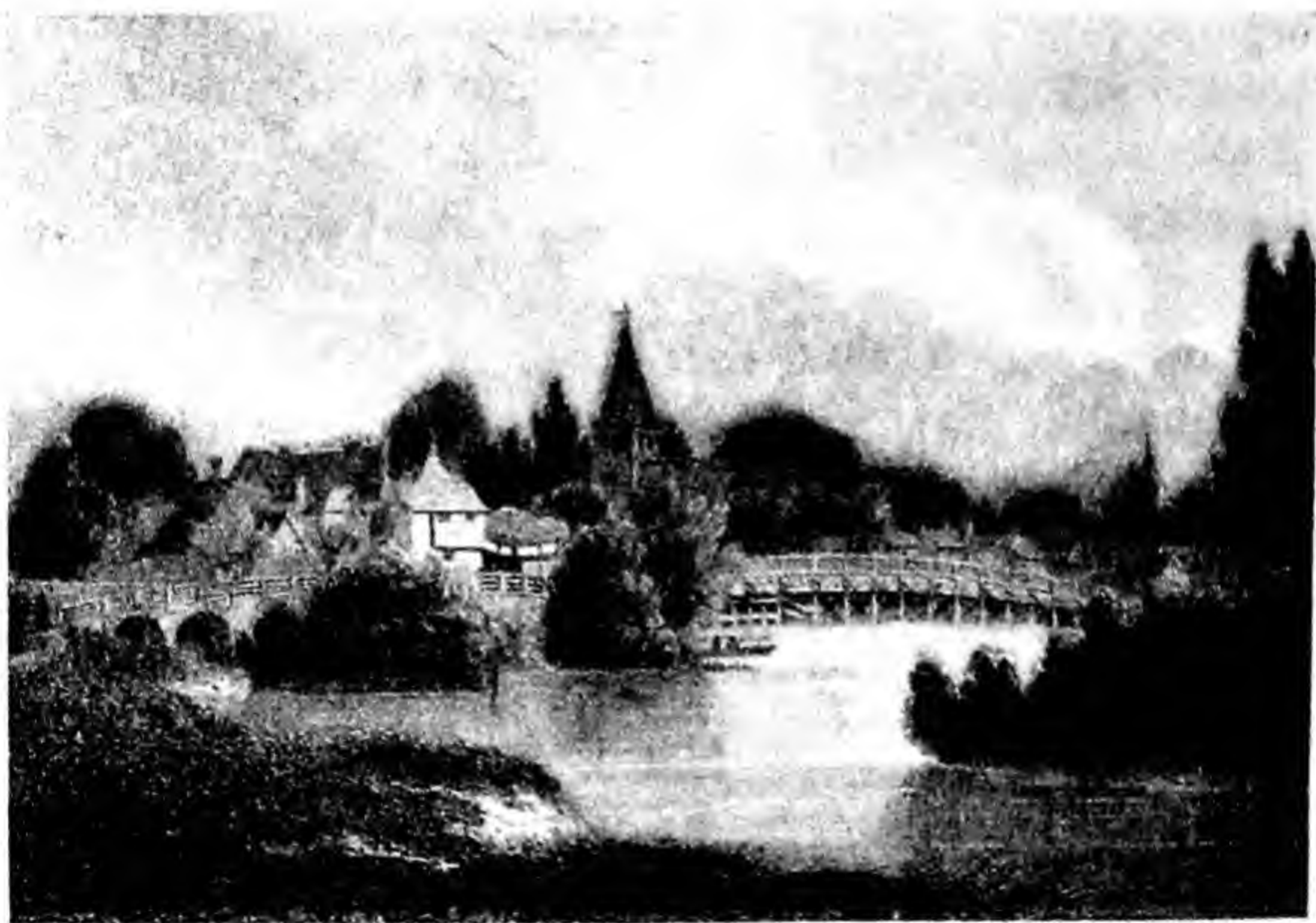
He died quietly that evening, and thus it happened that between sunrise and sunset of the same day Mary Tudor and her faithful kinsman, Reginald Pole, died, the one after five years' reign, the other after four years' spiritual administration of her kingdom. It seems as though Fate had willed for this great man a safe end in his native land. Had he lived he would have been the victim of his personal enemy, Caraffa, who had become Pope. Caraffa had already deposed Pole from his status as Legate ; he was also instituting the process of the Inquisition against him, and only Pole's death saved him from being summoned to Rome on a charge of heresy, with probable imprisonment, such was the venom of this corrupt Pope against one who had nobly served the Papacy. The unmerited disgrace saddened and hastened the Cardinal-Archbishop's death.

Rumour said that the Cardinal had left a vast fortune, but his estate was small and went to the eldest of Sir Geoffrey Pole's five sons. It is not known how long Bockmer remained in the Pole family after Sir Geoffrey had inherited it. The manor passed to a William Rice, who died in 1588, and later Bockmer came into the possession of John Borlase, who rebuilt the house and greatly enlarged it. It was a descendant, Sir John Borlase, whom Charles II and Nell Gwynne visited at Bockmer about 1665, coming on horseback from Windsor. Part of the old house still exists, and the period of the Borlases is marked in the drawing-room by a coat of arms in plaster, over the mantelpiece, which belonged to Samuel Backhouse, who married Sir William's sister and lived there. The panelling in

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the living-room is still intact and beautiful, but where once hung, no doubt, the swords and firelocks of Sir William, the college oar of a newer occupant is sported.

The memory of the Borlases is further perpetuated in the foundation of Borlase School, at Marlow, next door to the house in which Shelley lived for a year, and where we will now pay a visit, passing from Bockmer and matters ecclesiastical to Marlow and matters poetical.



MARLOW OLD BRIDGE.

THE GARDEN WELL

(For Lucy)

*At the bottom of the well,
Sixty-eight feet deep,
Three centuries of memories
Lie fast asleep.*

*If you let a stone drop,
You break the spell,
You hear the fairies sobbing
Deep in the well.*

*If you lower the bucket
And raise it again,
You bring up a horde
Of hobgoblin men.*

*If you drink the water,
You dream at night
Of a black-faced bride
In a gown of white.*

*If you wash your face in it,
And look in the glass,
You see a princess
On a white horse pass.*

*Oh, never boil the water,
Its steam is red,
And King Charles walks in it
Carrying his head.*

*The bottom of the well,
Sixty-eight feet deep,
Is filled with the tears
That fairies weep.*

CHAPTER VI

THE HERMIT OF MARLOW

I

As we go into Marlow, along a road that runs parallel to the river, which is in view from time to time, we shall come to the straggling street leading to the cross-ways which gives the town, in conjunction with its High Street, bridge, river, and church, a plan similar to that of Henley.

At the beginning of this long street, as we enter, we pass the Borlase School, Sir William Borlase's ancient foundation, that dates back to 1624, and which is now more flourishing than ever. Sir William was a friend of Ben Jonson's, and painted the portrait of the poet, which he presented to him with the lines :

*To paint thy worth, if rightly I did know it,
And were but painter half like thee a poet,
Ben, I would show it.*

The literary tradition continues, for Hugh Walpole was for two years a boarder at Borlase School.

Next to the school we come upon a row of four villas, noticeable for their charming Gothic pointed windows. Miss Whissitt says she remembers these smart little houses when they were in a semi-derelict

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condition. It is obvious that someone now cares for them. I should not have noticed them particularly, for they are in a street that has several attractive Georgian houses and Elizabethan cottages, but for a large stone tablet that is placed over the middle of this row of villas, and proclaims that Shelley, the poet, once dwelt there.

The tablet was placed A.D. 1867 at the instance of Sir William Robert Clayton, Bart., the local landowner, to perpetuate the record that Percy Bysshe Shelley lived and wrote in this house, and was here visited by Lord Byron. Sir William's worthy act of commemoration is curiously indifferent to dates and is spoilt, unfortunately, by a 'howler.' Byron never visited Shelley. He was not in England during Shelley's residence at Marlow. He was throughout that time in Venice, in the midst of his sordid adventures there.

Shelley occupied the house from March 1817 till February 1818. Byron had last seen Shelley in 1816, when Shelley, Mary Godwin, the daughter of Godwin, the atheistic journalist, then his mistress, and Claire Clairmont, destined to become Byron's mistress, had lived in a cottage on the shores of Lake Geneva. They had Lord Byron for a neighbour in the nearby Villa Diodati. In July, 1816, Shelley left Geneva, bringing home with him Mary Godwin and Claire.

There was living at Marlow in this year Thomas Love Peacock, the novelist, then some twenty-nine years of age. Peacock had little in common with Shelley's revolutionary views, but he was a scholar, and of kindly disposition. Tall, distinguished in

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appearance, he was to marry, in 1820, a Carnarvonshire beauty, by whom he had a son and three daughters, one of whom became the first wife of George Meredith. He was writing, at the time that he was living in Marlow, his novel *Headlong Hall*, and, later, *Nightmare Abbey*, which owes much to the notorious events of Medmenham Abbey, nearby, in which Shelley is thinly disguised as Scythorp. Peacock had originally met Shelley on a walking-tour in Wales. They corresponded subsequently, and made an excursion on the Thames to Lechlade, which laid the foundation of Shelley's passion for boating. When Shelley returned to England he visited Peacock at his house at Marlow. It was suggested that Shelley should settle in the same place, and they looked around for a house. Mary Godwin was then residing at Bath, and on learning of Shelley's intention she wrote warningly to her impetuous lover :

" But in the choice of a residence, dear Shelley, pray be not too quick or attach yourself too much to one spot . . . a house with a lawn, near a river or lake, noble trees or divine mountains—that should be our little mouse-hole to retreat to. But never mind this, give me a garden, and, *absentia* Claire, I will thank my love for many favours."

The house which Shelley found seemed to satisfy all of Mary Godwin's requirements except that the 'divine mountains' were absent and Claire was to be present. There was a glorious view of beechwoods ; the River Thames in one of its loveliest reaches lay across the fields. The property he had taken, on a lease, now divided into villas, seemed entirely suitable.

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It had a large garden behind it, with a mound surrounded by cypresses and yews, with a cedar tree among them.

This done, Shelley returned to Bath and his Mary. He had had no news of his wife Harriet, from whom he had separated, and on the day following his return he received the news that she had committed suicide, while pregnant. The news quite deranged Shelley, who, in parting from her, had made ample provision for her and her two children.

Shelley at once went to London, hoping to gain custody of Ianthe and Charles, the children in question. The case went to the Court of Chancery, and the judge, later, having pronounced Shelley's principles as 'highly immoral,' refused him custody of the children. He was the father also of a boy William, by Mary Godwin, whom he was now under contract to marry. One can understand the opinion of the judge, aware only of the outward circumstances of Shelley's matrimonial relations. He would have been still more confirmed in his condemnation had he been aware of another event in which the impetuous, unbalanced Shelley, in sheer kindness of heart, had involved himself. In January in the house at Bath, where Shelley had found temporary lodging for Mary and her kinswoman, Claire, the latter gave birth to a daughter.

During that holiday in the summer of 1816, on the shores of Lake Geneva, the weather being cold and rainy, Shelley, Mary Godwin, Claire Clairmont, Byron, 'Monk' Lewis, and Dr. Polidori, Byron's travelling physician, had congregated together. They

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amused themselves by telling and writing ghost stories, one of which, by Mary Godwin, was later published under the title of *Frankenstein*, to which Hollywood has given a new lease of life.

It was at this period that the intimacy between Byron and Claire began. She was a vivacious, dark-eyed, olive-cheeked girl with a passion for romance. She flung herself at Byron, an hypnotic personality for any unbalanced girl. Shelley and Mary Godwin were ignorant of this intrigue proceeding in their midst, as they were of the fact that Byron and Claire had met previously in London when she was seeking an engagement at Drury Lane as an actress.

The Shelley party, consisting of Shelley, Mary Godwin, their son William, Claire Clairmont, and a Swiss nurse, Élise, arrived back in England on September 8th, 1816. Shelley brought with him the third canto of Byron's *Childe Harold*, the proofs of which he corrected at Bath, and he saw the poem through the press. Shelley visited Peacock at Marlow on September 20th-24th, "A period," wrote Peacock, "of unbroken sunshine. The neighbourhood of Marlow abounds with beautiful walks; the river scenery is also fine. We took every day a long excursion, either on foot or on water. He took a house there, partly, perhaps principally, for the sake of being near me. While it was being fitted and furnished he resided at Bath."

Meanwhile Claire Clairmont had given birth to a daughter. This child, Lord Byron's, was given the name of Clara Allegra, but at first was referred to as Alba. It was born on January 12th, 1817, whilst

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Shelley was absent in London, attending to the Chancery proceedings. The suicide of Shelley's wife, his marriage to Mary Godwin fifteen days later, and, thirteen days after this, the birth of Byron's illegitimate child, and the agitation preceding Shelley's case in the Chancery Court for the custody of his children—all these events were crowded into the period between his leasing the property at Marlow, known as Albion House, and his entering into possession.

What kind of a house was it? To-day, the impression created by a row of small villas is wholly deceptive. These separate houses were once all part of Albion House itself, which stood alone in West Street. Peacock described it as "a house with many large rooms and extensive gardens. He took it on a lease of twenty-one years, furnished it handsomely, fitted up a library in a room large enough for a ballroom, and settled himself down, as he supposed for life."

Peacock had undertaken to superintend the fitting up of the house and the laying out of the grounds. He advised Shelley to marry Mary Godwin immediately after Harriet's death, and shortly after doing so the poet again visited Peacock at Marlow. They went to inspect the work on Albion House.

"I recollect a little scene which took place on this occasion. There was on the lawn a very fine old wide-spreading holly. The gardener had cut it up into a bare pole, selling the top for Christmas decorations. As soon as Shelley saw it he asked the gardener what had possessed him to ruin that beautiful tree. The

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gardener said he thought he had improved its appearance. Shelley said : " It is impossible that you can be such a fool ! " The culprit stood twiddling his thumbs along the seams of his trousers, receiving a fulminating denunciation, which ended in his peremptory dismissal. A better man was engaged, with several assistants, to make an extensive plantation of shrubs."

" Ah ! did you once see Shelley plain ? " one might have asked the unlucky gardener, in Browning's words. And to have seen Shelley angry can have been of little comfort to a humble gardener, all unaware that one early doomed, and destined for immortality, had given him his dismissal.

Shelley was excited by his new home. " I am now on the point of taking the lease of a house among woody hills, these sweet green fields and this delightful river," he wrote to Leigh Hunt. Mary Shelley, after informing Byron of the birth of his child, proceeded : " We have taken a house in Marlow, to which we intend to remove in about two months, and where we dare hope to have the pleasure of your society on your return to England."

The hope, despite the statement on the memorial plaque, was never fulfilled, for in the year of 1817 Byron was mainly in Venice. He made a summer trip to Ferrara, where he wrote *The Lament of Tasso*, and a trip to Rome which inspired the fourth canto of *Childe Harold*. Between writing poetry and these trips he was immersed in sordid love intrigues. This was the period of Marianna. " I have fallen in love, which, next to falling into the canal, is the best or worst thing

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I could do. I have got some extremely good apartments in the house of a 'Merchant of Venice,' who is a good deal occupied with business and has a wife in her twenty-second year. Marianna is in her appearance altogether like an antelope. She has the large black oriental eyes, with the peculiar expression in them which is seen rarely among Europeans—even the Italians—and which many of the Turkish women give themselves by tinging the eyelids."

Deep in his liaison, a figure at the salon of the brilliant Contessa Albrizzi, and immersed in the Fourth Canto, Byron had no taste or time for visiting the Shelleys at Marlow.

The new inhabitants of Albion House, who had moved in early in March 1817, were like storm-battered voyagers. They hoped they had found a refuge at last. They wished to be left alone, and to know no one outside their own personal circle. It was a singular *ménage* that descended upon the newly decorated house with the large library and garden. It was composed of Shelley, now aged twenty-four, his wife Mary, aged nineteen, their son William, some fourteen months old, the Swiss nurse Élise, Claire Clairmont on the verge of her nineteenth birthday, and her unchristened child (Allegra), two months old. The Marlow natives must indeed have wondered at this household of very young women, babies, and the bright-eyed, long-haired young man of erratic behaviour and mercurial temperament.

The Spring was in front of them. "We are immersed in all kinds of confusion here," wrote Shelley on March 9th, to his father-in-law, Godwin,

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notorious as an atheist and an incessant sponger on Shelley, from whom he extracted over £5,000, which had cost the generous poet £20,000 to raise during his financial straits. "Mary said you meant to come hither soon enough to see the leaves come out. Which leaves did you mean, for the wild briar's buds are already unfolded?" asked Shelley, with arboreal exactitude.

In April he wrote from Marlow to Byron in Venice. He had lost his case in the Chancery Court and was denied custody of his two children by Harriet; he had suspended over him a criminal prosecution for his publication of *Queen Mab*. "But all human evils either extinguish, or are extinguished by, the sufferer, and I am now living with my accustomed tranquillity and happiness in a house which I have taken near this town." He was agitated by the problem of Byron's child, "a little being whom we—in the absence of all right to bestow a Christian designation—call Alba, or the Dawn. She is very beautiful, and though her frame is of a delicate texture, enjoys excellent health. Her eyes are the most intelligent I ever saw in so young an infant. Her hair is black, her eyes deeply blue, and her mouth exquisitely shaped. She passes here for the child of a friend in London, sent into the country for her health. Indeed all these precautions have now become more necessary than before, on account of our renewed intimacy with Godwin."

Was there gossip in Marlow? Undoubtedly there was. Who were these strange people? Who was the young man of means, who spent much of his time in a

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boat on the river, scribbling verses, who had a girl wife—two girl wives?—and a child. And whose child was the other? Where was its father, and who was Miss Clairmont? Not at all nice people with their foreign nurse, and that atheist Godwin, and that bohemian journalist Leigh Hunt visiting them with his brood of children! They saw the poet sailing in his boat *The Vaga*. “I often met him,” wrote one, “going or coming from his island retreat near Medmenham Abbey. . . . He was the most interesting figure I ever saw, his eyes like a deer’s, his white throat unfettered.”

How the local tongues must have wagged, tongues with all the stamina and invention born of local gossip! Shelley was well aware of the insinuations about the strange family in Albion House. “What are your plans with respect to the little girl?” he asks Byron, anxiously. “A perpetual danger of discovery that it is Claire’s impends. Nothing would be easier than to own it was hers, and that it is the offspring of a private marriage in France. But the wise heads suppose that such a tale would make people consider it as mine, and that the inhabitants of this most Christian country would not suffer me to dwell among them under such an imputation. The answer to these difficulties, which would be most satisfactory to us, would be your own speedy return.”

That, of course, was the very answer Byron, in the middle of another liaison, was not prepared to make. “You can have no idea of my disgust and abhorrence of the thought of living there, even for a short time,”

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he wrote to a friend at this period. Shelley's appeal ended :

" I have my books, and a garden with a lawn, enclosed by high hedges, and overshadowed with firs and cypresses, intermixed with apple-trees now in blossom. We have a boat on the river in which, when the days are sunny and serene, such as we have had of late, we sail. May we hope that you will ever visit us ? Claire would be the most rejoiced of all of us at the sight of a letter written by you."

There was no answer. Byron, on a holiday in Rome, was pining for his Marianna, and watching with relish the guillotining of three robbers—" The first turned me quite hot and thirsty, and made me shake so that I could hardly hold the opera glass (I was close, but I was determined to see, as one should see, everything, once, with attention) ; the second and third (which shows how dreadfully soon things grow indifferent), I am ashamed to say, had no effect on me as a horror, though I would have saved them if I could," he wrote to his publisher.

Meanwhile Shelley was busy composing. He was burning to abolish injustice, to set the world right. He turned pamphleteer, and under the pseudonym of " The Hermit of Marlow " he rushed to press and published, at his own expense, *A Proposal for putting Reform to the Vote throughout the Kingdom*. On March 22nd he revealed himself as a close observer of trees. " It is a nice distinction you make between the development and the complete expansion of the leaves," he wrote to Godwin. " The oak and the chestnut would offer you a still subtler subdivision,

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which would enable you to defer the visit from which we expect so much delight for six weeks. I hope we shall really see you before that time, and that you will allow the chestnut or any other impartial tree, as he stands in the foreground, as a virtual representative of the rest."

Shelley's muse was in full spate. In March he wrote *Prince Athanase*. In April he had begun his long poem *The Revolt of Islam*, the story of two idealistic anarchists, Laon and Cythna, really a version of Mary and himself. It was composed, as was much of his poetry during this year, in the neighbourhood of Bisham Woods, above Marlow, or while he lay in his boat tethered to the trees by Bisham Abbey.

. . . among wild islands green,
Which framed for my lone boat a lone retreat
Of mossgrown trees and weeds, shall I be seen,

he wrote in the dedication. His wife added a note, in the posthumous edition of his poems, on the neighbourhood of Marlow during his time.

"The chalk hills break into cliffs that overhang the Thames, or form valleys clothed with beech; the wilder portion of the country is rendered beautiful by exuberant vegetation; and the cultivated part is particularly fertile. With all the wealth of Nature which, either in the form of gentlemen's parks or soil dedicated to agriculture, flourishes around, Marlow was inhabited by a very poor population. The women are lacemakers, and lose their health by sedentary labour, for which they were very ill paid. The Poor

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Laws ground to the dust not only the paupers, but those who had risen just above that state, and were obliged to pay poor rates. The changes produced by peace, following a long war, and a bad harvest, brought with them the most heart-rending evils to the poor."

Shelley, whose tender heart was touched by this local misery, did all he could. He gave money and service, and while visiting the cottages of the poor he contracted a bad attack of ophthalmia. In the winter months he bought blankets for the poorest and had a list of pensioners to whom he made a weekly allowance. Much of his indignation upon the local conditions went into his poem *The Revolt of Islam*; indeed, it was scathing to the point of invoking prosecution, and the publisher induced him to cancel some of the pages in the earlier version called *Laon and Cythna*.

Throughout this summer Shelley was unwell, depressed by the verdict of the Chancery Court, and terrified that he might lose the custody of his child, William. He composed a curse on the Lord Chancellor, fortunately not published, and in a poem to William wrote—

*Come with me, though the wave is wild,
And the winds are loose, we must not stay,
Or the slaves of the law may rend thee away.*

His health was wretched, and it was becoming clear that Marlow did not suit him, though he delighted in the river and the woods. He had frequent visitors, his

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friend Hogg, the Leigh Hunts and their children, and his neighbour Peacock, who drank up his wine and with whom he took long walks in the neighbourhood. They explored an area of some sixteen miles around Marlow, and sometimes walked to London. "The total distance was thirty-two miles to Tyburn Turnpike. . . . I never saw Shelley tired on these walks. Delicate and fragile as he appeared, he had great muscular strength," recorded Peacock. "We had also many pleasant excursions, rowing and sailing on the river, between Henley and Maidenhead."

But Shelley's nerves were in a jumpy condition. The gardener had already suffered, the music-master was also to have an experience of Shelley's explosions. The poet had asked Peacock to send him a music-master for Miss Clairmont. One morning Shelley rushed into Peacock's house shouting, "Barricade the doors, give orders that you are not at home!" He then passed the whole day in Peacock's house, in fearful anticipation that the unwelcome visitor he had run from at Albion House might again appear. On enquiry it transpired that the music-master's name, on announcement, had sounded very much like that of a person Shelley dreaded. When the servant had opened the library door, announcing the visitor, Shelley had sprung from his chair, exclaimed "I would just as soon see the devil!" had jumped through the window, run across the lawn, climbed the garden fence, and taken refuge in Peacock's house, leaving his astonished servant to inform the music-master that Mr. Shelley was not at home.

The death of Harriet preyed upon his nerves, and

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Peacock relates how, walking with Shelley one evening in Bisham Woods, he suddenly fell into a gloomy reverie. The next day the poet said to Peacock—"You must have thought me very unreasonable yesterday evening. I will tell you what I would not tell anyone else. I was thinking of Harriet."

Byron having made no reply to his letter of April 23rd, Shelley wrote again on July 9th to enquire what were his plans for Alba. Her presence was growing increasingly embarrassing. "A period approaches when it will be impossible to temporise with our servants or our visitors. There are two very respectable ladies in this town who would undertake the charge of her if you consent to this arrangement."

Who were these suitable young ladies of Marlow, one wonders even at this distant date, who might have been governesses to Lord Byron's child? It was not the burden but the embarrassment of which Shelley complained. Albion House was looked at askance. The Shelleys loved the child, were delighted with its intelligence and beauty. "Our Genevese nurse walks about with her and William all the day in the garden; and she is bathed, like him, in cold water."

The cold bath seemed to be in vogue in the Shelley household, for Mary Shelley wrote to Mrs. Hunt—"The country is very pleasant just now, but I see nothing of it beyond the garden. I am *ennuied*, as you may easily imagine, for want of exercise, which I cannot take. The cold bath is of great benefit to me. By the bye, what are we to do with it? Have you a

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place for its reception?" Mrs. Shelley's inability to take exercise preceded an event in the Marlow house. "But a nurse . . . I have a great aversion to having a Marlow woman," she wrote.

The Shelleys' daughter was born on September 7th and named Clara Everina. By this time Shelley's health had made a change imperative. He saw his doctor in London. "We must go to Italy, on every ground. This weather does me great mischief," wrote Shelley to his wife. It would also enable him to take Alba to Byron. Mrs. Shelley had never liked the Marlow house. "It is very damp, all the books in the library are mildewed. We must quit it," she wrote to a friend, and in September she complains, "What a dreadfully cold place this house is! I was shivering over a fire, and the garden looked cold and dismal; but so soon as I got into the road I found, to my infinite surprise, that the sun was shining, and the air warm and delightful."

Shelley, now that his mind was made up, was ruthless. From London he wrote to his wife—"We have decided at all events to quit it. Let us look the truth boldly in the face. We gave, we will say, £1,200 for the house. Well, we can get if we like £60 a year for the bare walls, and sell the furniture so as to realise £75 for every £100. This is losing scarcely anything, especially if we consider it in fact only so much borrowed on *post-obits*." But Mrs. Shelley did not think the business so simple. "Dearest love," she wrote, ". . . pray in your letters do be more explicit! You have advertised the house but have you given Madocks any orders about how to answer applicants?"

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And have you settled yet for Italy or the sea? And do you know how to get us money to convey us there, and to buy the things that will be absolutely necessary before our departure?"

In November, in the midst of his plans, Shelley once more appeared in print as "The Hermit of Marlow," this time in *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*. Only twenty copies were printed, and it was never published. He grew more and more despondent. He could not disguise the knowledge of disease working within him. "I sink into a state of lethargy and inanimation," he wrote from Marlow on December 7th, 1817, "and often remain for hours on this sofa, between sleep and waking, a prey to the most painful instability of thought. . . . I have experienced a decisive pulmonary attack; and although at present, it has passed away without any very considerable vestige of its existence, yet the symptom sufficiently shows the true nature of my disease to be consumption."

On December 17th he wrote to Byron announcing his delay in departure for Italy and asking if there was anyone to whom he could entrust Alba for the purpose of taking her to her father. Byron, writing later to a friend, says, "Vare is my *shild*? You must see Shelley about sending the illegitimate one with a nurse, in the spring," and added, later, "A clerk can bring the papers (and, by the bye, my child by Claire, at the same time. Pray desire Shelley to pack it carefully) with *tooth-powder*, red only; magnesia, soda-powders, tooth-brushes, diachylong plaster, and any new novels good for anything."

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Poor little Alba—she was no more than a Hebrew joke, and to be consigned with tooth-powders and plaster ! To another friend Byron wrote, “ Shelley (from Marlow) has written to me about my daughter (the last bastard one), who, it seems, is a great beauty ; and wants to know what he is to do about sending her. . . . I shall acknowledge and breed her myself, giving her the name of Biron (to distinguish her from Little Legitimacy) and mean to christen her Allegra, which is a Venetian name.” ‘ Little Legitimacy ’ was his daughter Augusta.

The house at Marlow was sold on January 25th, 1818. Shelley left Marlow for London on February 7th. Mrs. Shelley, and the household, having closed down, and left £117 for local accounts, followed in a few days. Just before they left England, on March 9th, the Shelley children and Allegra were christened in London. Allegra was described as “ the reputed daughter of Rt. Hon. George Gordon, Lord Byron, Peer, of no fixed residence, travelling on the Continent, by Clara Mary Jane Clairmont.” The Shelleys took with them a Marlow girl, Milly, who was in their service for two years.

Thus closed the Marlow episode. It was singular that Shelley should have come to a town not ten miles distant from Turville Park, which his grandfather, Bysshe Shelley, had owned through marriage with a Miss Perry, and where, four years after Shelley’s departure from Marlow, the celebrated General Dumouriez was to end his days.

Old houses invite speculation on the lives of those who have inhabited them. What were the destinies

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of the Shelley household, of that little group of human beings who had lived in Albion House for twelve months? The torch of immortality throws a light across the distant years, and we can follow the workings of fate.

Up till the date when the party set forth for Italy Byron had refused to correspond with Claire, and Shelley wrote from Lyons informing him that Allegra had come thus far on the way. Byron then insisted on the mother renouncing all rights to the child, and this consent was given, with grave misgivings owing to rumours of Byron's mode of life in Venice. "Shelley has got to Milan with the bastard, and its mother; but won't send the *shild* unless I will go and see the mother," wrote Byron to a friend, announcing his refusal.

Allegra was despatched with the nurse Élise, on April 28th, to Venice, where Byron, after a few weeks of public exhibition of her, placed her in the charge of Mrs. Hoppner, wife of the British Consul. "Your conduct," wrote Shelley to Byron, "must at present wear the aspect of great cruelty, however you justify it to yourself." In August Shelley was in Venice, and saw Byron and the little Allegra. On September 24th, Shelley's child Clara, born at Marlow, died, being just a year old. She was buried on the Lido. Claire was permitted to take Allegra to Este, in October, where Byron had lent Shelley a villa. At the end of the month Allegra was returned to Byron.

Shelley could not wholly dismiss the thought of Marlow from his mind. It now seemed that he had been happy there. He had worked there, his poor

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Clara had been born there. "I often revisit Marlow in thought. The curse of this life is that, whatever is once known, can never be unknown. You inhabit a spot, which, before you inhabit it, is as indifferent to you as any other spot on earth, and when, persuaded by some necessity, you think to leave it, you leave it not ; it clings to you. . . ." Thus he wrote to Peacock, from abroad, and later : "Who lives in my house at Marlow now, or what is to be done with it ? I am seriously persuaded that the situation was injurious to my health, or I should be tempted to feel a very absurd interest in who is to be its next possessor."

In 1819 Byron was living in the Palazzo Mocenigo, writing *Don Juan*, and in the thick of his disreputable amours. In April he found a new attachment : "I have fallen in love with a Romagnola Countess from Ravenna, who is nineteen years old and has a Count of fifty." This was the Countess Guiccioli, and in June he visited her and her family at Ravenna, taking Allegra with him. That same month, in Rome, the Shelleys lost another child, little William, aged two years and a half. He was buried in the English cemetery.

In July the Shelleys were living near Leghorn, where "Milly surprised us the other day by first discovering a comet, on which we have been speculating she may 'make a stir, like a great astronomer'," wrote Shelley. And there Milly, the Marlow girl, disappears from history. She made no further stir, and probably returned later to Marlow with the most wonderful account of her adventures. Shelley wrote to England, anxious about "some things from Furnivall." This

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referred to Dr. Furnivall, a surgeon of Egham, who was called in to attend Mrs. Shelley at Marlow on the birth of Clara. Shelley had great confidence in Furnivall, who rode from Egham to Marlow, a distance of seventeen miles, to attend the poet and his wife. They became very friendly. Unfortunately Furnivall destroyed old letters, so none of Shelley's survived, but his son found that the surgeon had entered the poet's name, not in the book kept for richer patients, but in the one recording visits to the poorer, and, against an account of Shelley's for seven guineas, the surgeon had marked the receipt of one guinea. Since the Shelleys were good payers it is likely that Furnivall may have refused any further fee from Shelley, whom he greatly liked.

In November, 1819, Mrs. Shelley, in Florence, gave birth to a little boy, destined to become Sir Percy Florence Shelley and to succeed his grandfather as third baronet. Byron at this time was uncertain of future plans. He talked of returning to London and taking Allegra with him, of going to America, or to South America. "There is packing and preparation going on, and I mean to plod through the Tirol with my little *shild* Allegrina, who, however, is not very well . . . at present all my plans are lulled upon the feverish pillow of a sick infant." In May of 1820, Shelley was still trying to induce Byron to show a more reasonable attitude towards Claire and Allegra. A rascally servant, Paolo, had married Élise, the Swiss maid, and Shelley had to get rid of them. They took revenge by spreading the libel that Shelley had a *liaison* with Claire, who gave birth to a child, a story Byron

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abetted by withholding Shelley's letter of indignant denial when the British Consul in Venice advanced it as a reason for cutting the Shelleys.

Byron proved obdurate, despite Shelley's pleading, and in October declined all correspondence with Claire on the subject of Allegra. He sent Allegra to a convent at Bagnacavallo. Shelley visited her there and was moved by the child's wistful beauty. When Claire expressed alarm about her health, Byron threatened to send her to a secret convent. On April 19th, 1822, Allegra died of a fever. Claire appealed to see the body before it was sent to England, and asked for a miniature and a lock of hair, to which request Byron acceded. She wore the miniature till the day of her death in 1879. Allegra was buried at Harrow, and in the church a mural tablet declared her to be the daughter of Lord Byron, aged five years three months. Byron died at Missolonghi exactly two years later.

Fate had not finished its inscrutable purpose with the former household at Marlow. Within three months of the death of Allegra, on July 8th, Shelley, accompanied by his friend Elleker Williams and a sailor boy, Charles Vivian, set forth in his sailing yacht *Ariel* from Leghorn, and was caught in a storm off Viareggio. The yacht foundered and its three occupants were drowned. Shelley's and Williams's bodies were cremated on the seashore. Later the poet's ashes, except for the heart, which was sent home to England, were deposited in the English cemetery at Rome, near by the grave of Keats. It was intended that little William Shelley's ashes should be united with those of his father, but it was discovered that the boy's tombstone had been placed

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over the wrong grave, and the actual position of the remains was unknown.

How swiftly Death had smitten the late occupants of Albion House. Within four years two of Shelley's children, Clara and William, Shelley himself, and Allegra had died, the three children in infancy, Shelley in his young manhood, aged thirty. The house had heard the children's play and Shelley's infectious laughter. It had also witnessed the poet's anxieties and his anguish at the decision of the Chancery Court. It had known the eager discourse of ardent young men on the threshold of their careers, and a succession of visitors, Peacock, Hogg, the Leigh Hunts among them, who have escaped oblivion either by their own works or their association with that soaring spirit which, to quote its own tribute to Keats :

—like a star

Beacons from the abode where the Eternals are.

II

Albion House to-day, subdivided into four villas, is no longer an isolated building. The Borlase School has extended and touches it on one side. The great garden has gone. It requires some imagination to reconstruct the house as it must have been in Shelley's days. But the Gothic pointed windows and the roof are the same. What of the interior? Curiosity overcoming me, I did what is so often done to me in my cottage, I rang the bell boldly, but by proxy, for I telephoned to the occupier of the part still called Albion House. No one could have exceeded his

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hospitality, his readiness to show me everything, and to explain all he knew regarding Shelley's tenure. An architect by profession, he had noticed, like Miss Whissitt, the cottages falling into ruin and had bought them and restored them, retaining for himself the part of the original house which had been Shelley's library.

The exterior does not prepare one for the space of the interior. A long room with a window looking on to the garden fits Peacock's exaggerated description of a room large enough for a ballroom. There is the window, undoubtedly, out of which Shelley looked into his garden. The garden is no longer the extensive one Shelley described. Gone are the high hedges, the apple trees he saw in blossom, the firs ; but the cedar tree on its mound remains to-day, in the middle of the lawn, under which the poet sat and worked, and where, if a local legend be true, he was pelted with apples by the boys of Borlase School. Doubtless, his wild, unconventional appearance, together with the rumours this strange family provoked, had made him an object of interest, if not of derision, to the neighbouring schoolboys. They saw him walking up and down West Street, his shirt opened at the neck, his head crowned with a garland of ' Traveller's Joy,' or watched him giving his coat or boots to some beggar.

And while my host took me over his garden, where Shelley's son had played, and Claire had nursed her infant Allegra, the noise of schoolboys' voices over the wall gave sudden point to a memory evoked by some lines written by Shelley in the dedication of the *Revolt of Islam*, wherein the voices were utilised for a simile of a world too brutal for the sensitive poet :

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*. . . a fresh May dawn it was,
When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
And wept, I know not why, until there rose
From the near schoolroom voices that, alas !
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.*

The cedar tree still stands, the grass still glitters, from the near school voices arise, but the ecstasies, the anxieties, the griefs that visited the young poet and his girl-wife are for ever quieted and forgotten. For a moment, under the roof that had sheltered him, looking out of the window of his library, or standing in the shade of the tree that had shadowed him, memory evokes the poet, intense, bright-eyed, a spirit of ecstasy and flame. Then he is gone, and we may seek him only in his immortal verse.



ALBION HOUSE IN SHELLEY'S TIME.

THE MOON A LOVELY MAIDEN IS

*The moon a lovely maiden is
Who hides from me through all the day,
Enwrapped in cloudy mysteries
That fall away
At sunset when she kneels to pray ;
The moon a lovely maiden is.*

*The moon has sorrowful large eyes,
And her round face is pale with fright ;
What is the fear from which she flies
With face so white ?
Her absence darkens the dark night ;
The moon has sorrowful large eyes.*

*A maiden who has never smiled
The shy moon is, most beautiful,
Most virtuous and undefiled,
And dutiful—
Yet pleasanter to kiss a skull ;
A maiden who has never smiled.*

*Perhaps the moon no maiden is,
But one who goes with silent tread
And gives a cold and solemn kiss
To all the dead,
And sleeps a while within each bed ;
Perhaps the moon no maiden is.*

CHAPTER VII

THE HOBYS OF BISHAM

I

AND so, having thus satisfied curiosity and paid homage, let us leave Albion House and follow West Street, taking a glance at Remnantz, almost opposite, the precursor of Sandhurst, where the Royal Military College was first established in 1799, until we come to the broad High Street, leading to the church, the river, and the picturesque suspension bridge. Here we may look upstream to Bisham Abbey, soon to entertain us, or downstream to the wide weir, past the gay gardens, lawns, and summer pavilion of *The Compleat Angler*.

But we have a call to make on Mr. Pinfold, a local character. He lives in some rooms in the High Street, and it is from his parlour window that we get a view of the Post Office, a very fine specimen of a Georgian house that the Government has done well to acquire and preserve. Out of its door once stepped many a Regency buck, one is certain, and from its windows no doubt, Miss Amelia, busy on her sampler, watched handsome young Mr. Wethered, the brewer's son, sauntering down the High Street towards his father's delightful double-bow-windowed house with its pillared portico. Poor Miss Amelia! Poor Mr. Wethered! He died in 1815, aged twenty-five, "suddenly called in

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the vigour of youth and health from the fond bosom of domestic happiness," as the memorial in Marlow Church records.

I think Mr. Pinfold, too, is one of the sights of Marlow. He is a retired gentleman, though what he retired from no one has ever known. He once described himself as 'poor but independent.' His generosity always exceeds his capacity, and he is ever in a condition of 'hard-up-ness' owing to his great failing—an utter incapacity to keep out of antique-dealers' shops. The result is seen in a house cluttered with bric-à-brac, and a herd of porcelain cows that form a frieze round the parlour ceiling and occupy every inch of the mantelpiece.

It is in keeping with Mr. Pinfold's strict adherence to a Victorian manner that he always asks you to take 'a dish of tea,' in a cosy parlour lined with prints and portraits, of which the dominating one is an enormous canvas of a military grandfather, complete with scarlet coat, medals, and sword, and a formidable gash over the left breast, not obtained in battle, but from a removal of furniture.

From Mr. Pinfold's well-nourished presence we will go forth and look at the famished lady, who sits on a plinth between the village stocks and an old prison door in a little public garden in front of the church. The lady, carved in stone, is quite naked, and sits dangling her legs over a column. Her starved body proved too much for the local youths, and she has had to be protected by a railing from their ribald inscriptions. Who is she? Someone said it was a memorial to a favourite Gaiety chorus girl who spent her week-ends at Marlow.

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But this is not so. She is anonymous, and symbolic neither of famine nor grief. She is part of a memorial to Charles Frohman, an American theatrical producer, who spent his vacations at Marlow, and went down in the *Lusitania*. The quotation on the plinth always defeats the attempt to trace its source. "For it is not right that in a house the Muses haunt mourning should be." It is a loose transcription from one of the poems of Sappho, and was quoted by Socrates, in kind reproof, to his wife Xanthippe, when he was about to drink poison.

Marlow, like Henley, retains its old-world air, but it has lost its commercial importance. It was once renowned for the manufacture of bone lace, long before Nottingham achieved its reputation, and for meat skewers ! It was also a great depôt of the river barge traffic, and many bargemasters resided there. In the time of Queen Elizabeth there were some seventy locks between Abingdon and London, sixteen floodgates, and seven weirs, but not more than ten or twelve barges proceeded farther upstream than Marlow or Bisham. Marlow's name comes into the famous taunt that was flung at bargees—"Who ate puppy pie under Marlow Bridge?"—chaff certain to provoke the language of a bargee. The taunt had its origin in the story of the landlord of an inn at Medmenham who, having noticed that the bargemen intended to plunder his larder, baked a pie of young puppies which they stole and ate under Marlow Bridge, believing them to be rabbits.

The church, a pleasant specimen of modern building, unjustly abused, I feel, stands beside the river, its burial-ground lying within sight of lashing weir and

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graceful bridge, all backed by the Quarry Woods. In the church vestry we must glance at the famous Spotted Boy's portrait, painted by Coventry in 1811. It was the present of John Richardson, a native of Marlow, who toured the country with a show. He announced that he had purchased a black-and-white spotted boy for the sum of one thousand guineas. This was a spotted negro boy from the Caribbean Islands, an extraordinary *lusus naturæ*. The unfortunate child seems to have been a good investment, and Richardson made a handsome profit. A contemporaneous account sounds a delightful note of unctuous commendation.

“ Mr. Richardson proved a most benevolent patron to this little orphan, whom he caused to be baptised . . . and afterwards educated with the utmost tenderness until his premature death in 1812, at the age of about eight years, when he was buried in the churchyard here, and has a gravestone with a long inscription to his memory ; while this painting preserves a faithful likeness of this curious and wonderful being, and is a monument of Mr. Richardson's munificence and affection.”

Let us turn to another curious memorial, a bas-relief in the church porch. It represents a coach and four runaway horses with a wheel smashed and no driver. This scene commemorates the fatal accident in 1652 on Holborn Hill that overtook Sir Myles Hobart, who lived near Marlow, and was a local M.P. Sir Myles distinguished himself, and was imprisoned for two years, for locking the door of the House of Commons, while fellow-members forcibly held the Speaker in his chair, during the reading of a remonstrance against

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tonnage and poundage in 1629, after which Charles I ruled without a Parliament for eleven years. The Long Parliament voted £5,000 to his children as a testimonial to his meritorious suffering. The memorial to Sir Myles has the singular interest of being the first erected in England at the expense of the country. The expense could not have been much !

From the portrait of the spotted negro boy and the bas-relief of the upset M.P. let us turn to look at a holy hand. It is in the little Pugin-built Roman Catholic chapel and purports to be the hand of St. James the Apostle. No one who has travelled extensively in Italy can fail to be sceptical concerning the mass of relics bottled and encased for the adoration of the trustful. The delirium that marked the ceremony of the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, a yearly event in the cathedral at Naples, which I witnessed on one occasion, and the sheer tonnage of holy bones that I have been invited to peer at by solicitous acolytes, have cured me of any tendency towards the relic fetish. But since objects of Greek and Roman times have survived, it is fair to presume that a few relics of the saints may be authentic.

What shall we say about this reputed hand of St. James the Apostle, preserved in its glass case ? It is at the outset more credible than the wing of the angel who brought a piece of the True Cross, once exhibited in the chantry chapel on Caversham Bridge, when competition in the relic business was at its height. It has a good pedigree, but like most long pedigrees, there is a gap where faith must support what history fails to supply.

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Paul, Bishop of Altino, a place between Padua and Concordia, troubled by the barbarian invasion around 640, abandoned his see and sought refuge on the island of Torcello, the most ancient settlement in the Venetian lagoons, originally called Nuovo Altino, whose peace is felt even to-day by the visitor from Venice. The Bishop took with him to his new see the hand of St. James, which appeared duly in the list of the church treasure. Up to this year, 640, there is a gap, and after the bishop's flight there is another long gap until 1040, when Adalbert, Archbishop of Bremen, took it from Torcello. On his death the hand went to the Emperor, Henry IV, and it was kept among the imperial regalia until the death of Henry V, in 1123, when his widow, the Empress Maud (or Matilda), daughter of Henry I of England, brought it to this country. There is little reason to doubt the authenticity of all this, and the letter from Henry I presenting the hand to Reading Abbey, exists in the British Museum to-day.

The letter runs :

“ Henry, King of England and Duke of Normandy, to the abbot and convent of Reading, greeting. Know that the glorious hand of blessed James the Apostle, which the Empress Maud, my daughter, gave me on her return from Germany, I, at her request, do send to you, and give for ever to the church of Reading.”

The next step in the descent is somewhat misty. When Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries Reading Abbey fell under his edict. It ranked third among the abbeyes of England, and had an enormous revenue. The unfortunate Abbot, the thirty-first of his line, was hanged, drawn and quartered with two of his monks in

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his own gateway. It was said that Henry took away the holy relics, including pieces of the Holy Cross, and the hand, but it is suggested that he took a substituted hand, for in the eighteenth century an embalmed hand was found among the ruins of Reading Abbey when they were digging the foundations of the gaol. Genuine or not genuine, the hand is a relic with a curious history and I envy no one who gets a thrill out of the gruesome thing.

We must now cross the suspension bridge, being on our way to lunch at Bisham Abbey. The first bridge was built by the Knights Templars. The present suspension bridge was erected in 1829. Its existence has been threatened because it is narrow for motor traffic. I hope we shall be spared any vandalism in connection with this singularly graceful bridge, with its lovely views up and down stream, and the daintiness of its ironwork contrasted with the fortress-like gateways at either end, from which the bridge is supported. It crowns the quiet beauty of Marlow. It has another virtue. It is one of the few bridges on which loungers cannot sit.

A few twists and turns, and we have left the old riverside town. Then, on our right, almost hidden beside some cottages, opens the drive of Bisham Abbey. Whenever I turn in at that gateway to call on the hospitable lady who dwells in this ancient and lovely abbey, my heart quickens a little. Every leaf along that drive seems to have fallen from the tree of history, every stone of the house that confronts me seems mortared with blood and tears, and from the windows faces peer out that belong to the pageantry of England,

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to Henry VIII, Anne of Cleves, Queen Elizabeth, Warwick the King-maker, to soldiers and courtiers who fell in battle or were doomed to the scaffold.

As we approach we see the one remaining side of the former cloisters, over which is built out a lovely oriel window. Then, in the shadow of the side of the house we come to a Gothic door, with an arched entrance chamber. When the door opens we step into an enormous dim hall, high raftered, and shut off at the entrance by an oak screen. As we proceed down this great hall to greet our hostess, Lady Vansittart-Neale, our path is thronged by a hundred ghosts. From the very stones on which we walk we can evoke them, ghosts with crowns on their heads, ghosts with no heads at all, the mark of the executioner's axe on their throats.

How old is Bisham Abbey? It stands on the banks of the Thames, with wide lawns, grey-stoned, gable-roofed, turreted, and, in part, battlemented, all that the mind imagines when one speaks of an ancient, stately home. Behind it rises a noble range of beech-woods, before it spread the level meadows across the river towards Marlow. Not far distant, embowered in trees, stands Bisham Church itself, for this remains of the two churches, the Abbey itself having been converted to domestic use.

The Manor of Bisham was granted by William the Conqueror to Henry de Ferrars and a descendant settled it in the reign of King Stephen as a Preceptory of Templars. This order was founded by Baldwin, King of Jerusalem, for defending pilgrims to the Holy Land from robbery during their journey to and from

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Jerusalem. The King gave the Templars a lodging in his palace on the south side of the Temple of Jerusalem. At first these knights, who were really a body of armed travel agents for religious sightseers, had one house for every ten, but they waxed so strong on the pilgrim traffic that in one hundred and fifty years they had obtained no less than ten thousand manors in Christendom !

The Order first came to England in 1100, and its headquarters were the Temple Church still existing in the Temple, London. They owned mills along the Thames, and one of England's loveliest golf-courses, Temple, is laid over the lands they owned by the riverside. One can hole out on a green in full view of the Chiltern Hills, and the mill run by the Templars, which in present times has become a paper mill. The Templars became too powerful. They were suppressed by a Papal Bull in 1308 and their properties went to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, who began with pious intentions, but again profited by the pilgrim business, and developed into a military organisation with headquarters at Rhodes, which they made the bulwark of Christianity in the Levant until Solyman the Magnificent conquered the fortress island after a tremendous siege.

The tenancy of these Knights at Bisham was of short duration. Edward III granted the Manor to William de Montagu or Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, in 1336, who founded in part of the house a monastery of the Order of St. Augustine. This Order lived under one roof having a common dormitory and refectory.

After more than five hundred years there comes to

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light a singular proof of the founding of this Abbey by William de Montagu. As you stand in the entrance porch, waiting for the butler to open the door, you will see on the right wall a long framed rubbing of an ancient brass with a Norman French inscription. It runs : " Edward Roy d'Anglête qe fist le siege devant la cite de Berwyke e conquyst le bataille illeoyes et la dite cite la veille seinte Margarete lan de grace MCCCXXXIII mist cette pere a la requeste Sire William de Montagu foundour de ceste mesoun." Edward, King of England, made a siege before the city of Berwick and won the battle there, and the city, on the eve of St. Margaret, in the year of grace 1333.

Edward III and the Earl in 1333 had fought together against the Scots and victory had crowned them at Halidon Hill, outside Berwick. From the inscription it is probable that Edward III, at Montagu's request, put up this brass tablet at Bisham, where he was a frequent visitor, to commemorate their comradeship in arms, and in particular their success in 1333 before the city of Berwick.

The manner in which this brass tablet came to be found is extremely singular. In 1872 some restorations were being made at Denchworth Church, Berks, where a brass was taken down from a tomb. This brass had been sold for old metal when Bisham Abbey was dismantled in 1539, under the orders of Henry VIII, and was bought by William Hyde, owner of the Manor of Denchworth, who put a Latin inscription on the reverse side, and fixed it up on his vault as a memorial to his wife and himself. When, in the course of the repairs, the brass was removed, the

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Norman French inscription relating to the foundation of the priory was discovered !

Many members of the Salisbury family were buried in the Abbey church. There was the founder of the priory himself, and with him his son William, a hero of Poitiers, and John the grandson, beheaded for treason by Henry IV, and Thomas the great grandson, a warrior who died before Orleans in 1428, and whose body was brought to England. He was highly esteemed in the English Army—"one of thy eyes, and thy cheek's side cut off," Shakespeare wrote in tribute. He was almost the first man to die from a cannon fired by gunpowder. Polydore Vergil describes his death. "The city had now endured about sixty days, not without much bloodshed on both sides. The Earl of Salisbury, impatient of such delay, purposeth to give a general assault. The better to consider upon the course, he stands to take a view at a window barred with iron, which overlooked the city toward the East. . . . A bullet of a great piece which lay levelled at the window, discharged by the gunner's son, a lad, struck the grates, whose splinters so wounded the Earl, and one, Sir Thomas Eargrave, that they both died of the uncurable hurts within a few days."

The Earl had left precise instructions for his funeral at Bisham. He ordered a tomb four feet high, with place on the one side for Lady Alianore, his late wife, and on the other for Lady Alice, his surviving wife. Alas for human frailty ! Lady Alice, Chaucer's granddaughter, had married once before she became the spouse of the Earl, and soon after his death she married a third time, her husband being the Duke of

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Suffolk. Salisbury's elaborate tomb was destroyed at the Reformation ; her own magnificent sarcophagus, with a statue of her lying wearing the Garter on her arm, is one of the glories of Ewelme Church.

In the Abbey church there were also buried another Earl of Salisbury, beheaded in 1461, Warwick the King-maker, and his brother, Lord Montagu, killed at the battle of Barnet, and his grandson, Edward Plantagenet, beheaded in 1499, on a charge of attempting to escape from the Tower. Surely Bisham holds the record among private mansions for the number of illustrious owners who died in battle or lost their heads under the axe ! The dreadful tradition was to continue with the line of the Salisburys, when it came to the de la Pole inheritors.

When we step into the hall, and pass through the screen going towards the noble fireplace given by James I to the Earl of Plymouth, where our hostess awaits us, we pass by the empty grave of Warwick the King-maker. My hostess's daughter startled me by saying she had been down into it. During some repairs to the floor of the great hall the empty tomb was revealed—who stole the body no one knows—and she went into it. The ancient monuments have disappeared, but one of the Vansittarts remembered tombstones lying flat in the present hall.

The Earl of Salisbury, who had been beheaded at Pomfret in 1461, and whose head had been exposed on a pole over the gates of York, was accorded a magnificent funeral here later. His body was disinterred, the head restored, and together with the bodies of his son, killed at Wakefield, and his wife, who had died of

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grief, he was interred in the resting-place of the Nevilles with all the pomp and ceremony of heraldry. What a scene this old hall must have witnessed on February 15th, 1463 ! There were two conductors in black, then a chariot with the coffins, drawn by six horses, with the arms and bannerols of St. George, before and behind. After the chariot rode the son and heir, the Earl of Warwick, with Earls' sons and sixteen knights. A mile out of Marlow two Kings of Arms and two Heralds met the procession and conducted it to the Abbey, where it was met by the Lord Chancellor, the Bishops of Salisbury and St. Asaph, the Lord Chamberlain, two mitred abbots, and a great concourse of gentlemen, and among the ladies the Duchess of Suffolk, Lady Hastings, Lady Margaret of Salisbury, Lady Stanley, Lady Montagu. On the morrow there was a High Mass, and all the Earl's orders and decorations were displayed, coat, sword, helm, and tymbre, with elaborate ceremonies of delivery and reception from the Garter, Windsor, Chester, Clarenceux heralds and pursuivants. There were offerings of cloth of gold from the Dukes, Earls, and Barons, and for two days the elaborate pageantry of this burial ceremony proceeded before a great concourse of nobles. We are even told what some of the funeral expenses were ; every herald received forty-five shillings for each day, the pursuivants twenty shillings and sixpence, as well as "an allowance of black and white and other duties and fees."

It is sad to think that the monuments to Warwick the King-maker, and to Lord Montagu were in the hall until the middle of the eighteenth century and were

only then removed on the erection of the present screen. One of the most remarkable facts about this remarkable place is that it has been occupied continuously as a dwelling since 1336, and many of the changes made in the structure were for domestic convenience. The connection of the Salisbury family continued till the dissolution of the monastic establishment, which had existed side by side with the dwelling-house.

The present abbey was afterwards the country house of the Countess of Salisbury, whose father-in-law had lived at Bockmer and who was the mother of Cardinal Pole. On this unhappy woman's execution her goods and lands were confiscated by the Crown and in 1536 Henry VIII turned out the prior and the monks. Henry refounded the establishment in the following year as a Benedictine Abbey with thirteen monks, but dissolved it two years later. The King then granted the Manor and Abbey to his discarded wife, Anne of Cleves, but owing to his dying soon after the grant was made, the deed was not properly executed until the reign of Queen Mary.

There is a letter in the British Museum from Anne of Cleves to Mary, in which the former is anxious about the confirmation of her rights and her rents, and she beseeches Mary to permit her to exchange Bisham with Sir Philip Hoby for his house in Kent, which she preferred. The letter of appeal closes: "Your assured loving Friend to her little power to command, Anna, the Dowager of Cleves." The change was made, and thus in 1553 there comes to Bisham Abbey the Hoby family. We will concern ourselves with the two brothers, Sir Philip and Sir Thomas, both

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prominent at Court, in diplomacy and the world of letters.

III

The Hobys are the more vivid of all the occupants of Bisham Abbey. Philip was born in 1505, the elder of two brothers. He went to Court under the patronage of the Earl of Worcester, where his gift for affairs of State was soon discovered. At the early age of thirty-three he was entrusted with important diplomatic work, held the office of Master of the Ordnance, was made a Privy Councillor under Edward VI and was appointed English Ambassador at the Court of the Emperor Charles V. He went in 1551 with the Marquis of Northampton to invest the French King with the Garter, and departed for the French Court in great state, attended by two gentlemen of his own in velvet coats with chains of gold.

The following spring he was sent to the Queen Dowager of Hungary, Regent of the Netherlands, to complain of infringements of England's naval and commercial interests. He was present at the siege of Boulogne and was knighted after the conquest of the town in September, 1544. When in Italy he formed a friendship with Titian and the notorious Aretino, who dedicated a book to Henry VIII, for which he received a gratuity conveyed by Sir Philip. Though his sympathies had been strongly in favour of the Reformation, and he showed some zeal as a commissioner for the suppression of the Catholic institutions, he was retained by Queen Mary and employed in financial and diplomatic missions on the Continent during her brief

reign, a tribute to the value set on his services. He purchased various church lands in Worcestershire, and the Bisham Abbey estate, partly in exchange with Ann of Cleves, in 1552.

The mansion-house "wherein the late Countess of Salisbury sometime inhabited," was then described as "a dwelling-house adjoining the late monastery there, built partly of stone and partly of timber, with a tiled roof." Sir Philip found the great hall and the abbot's lodgings, built of timber and brick, existing on ground between the Thames and the mansion. Sir Philip began building. He pulled down much of the old monastery and utilised the material for his new house, adding a chimney to the great hall. Hitherto the smoke had gone out through a hole in the centre of the roof, as some of the beams still show. He built on to one side of the house, and added some bedrooms. The great hall was still the centre of family life. There were no means of communication between the guests' rooms at one end of the hall and the family rooms at the other except by passing through the hall. Security was the main idea; the guests could not get to the lord of the manor except through the hall, in which dwelt and probably slept a guard of servants.

For Sir Philip and his wife, the daughter of Sir Walter Stonor, there was a solar or withdrawing room, used as a reception room and a bedroom. Later it became known as the Council Chamber. One side of the cloisters remain to this day, the rest were probably pulled down to provide material for his large additions on the north side.

Despite his building operations, Sir Philip seems to



Sir Edward Hoby

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have entertained at Bisham. He had returned from Flanders in 1556 and spent Easter at Bisham with his brother Thomas. He wrote inviting Sir William Cecil of Burleigh to visit him in July.

“What should stay you, I know not, but well am I assured that I have not heard one make so many promises, and perform so few. Peradventure my Lady stayeth you, who you say cannot ride; thereto will I provide this remedy, to send her my coach, because she shall have the less travail thither, and you no excuse to make. Let me know by this bearer when I shall look for you at Bisham, that my coach may come for her, for otherwise if you come not there will chance a greater matter than you yet know of. Make my commendations to my Lady, I pray you, and till I see you at Bisham, I bid you both farewell.”

Did he send his coach for the wife of “the right worshipful and my very frend Sir William Cicill”? It would seem so, or the lady came in her own, for on a midsummer’s day the next year Sir William and his wife were guests at Bisham, according to the diary of brother Thomas, who, after their departure and that of Sir Philip, “remained at home to see his new building go forward.”

The tapestries now hung in the hall were cut and hung by Sir Thomas or his brother for the tapestry room, newly built. They are Flemish tapestries woven in Brussels about 1530, and illustrate the history of Tobias. They are in excellent preservation, and may have belonged to Henry VIII, or have been bought for him by Sir Philip, for there is evidence that the brothers were employed to buy tapestries. “I did

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write unto my Lord Privy Seal (Thomas Cromwell) of a rich hanging off Arras the which Philip Hobbie hath seen who can make report thereof," wrote the British Agent in Flanders.

Sir Philip was not destined to enjoy his new house for long. "The 18th of April my brother Philip went from Bisham to London, there to seek the aid of physicians, where he made his last will and testament," recorded his brother, in his diary for 1558, and on May 20th, he added—"Departed my brother out of this life to a better, at 3 o'clock in the morning." On June 9th, the body was conveyed by water to Bisham and buried there.

Philip's young brother, Thomas, inherited the estate, and, as if in a hurry to set up his household, he married on June 27th, Elizabeth Cooke, daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, to whom he had proposed the previous month. Philip had died aged fifty-three, Thomas was now twenty-eight and widely travelled. He had already made a translation that was to give him a literary reputation in 1561, when it was published, and he kept a diary of his travels. The manuscript of this diary-autobiography, now in the British Museum, remained at Bisham Abbey till the close of the eighteenth century, when the estate was sold to the Vansittarts. The autobiography, which begins in 1547 and closes in 1564, is piquantly entitled "A Booke of the Travaile and Lief of me Thomas Hoby, wt diverse things woorth the notinge."

Hoby went up to Cambridge when he was fifteen, and after two years' work there he travelled on the Continent, to study foreign languages and affairs. In

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August, 1547, he left London in the company of a London merchant and went to Strasbourg. During the autumn of 1548 his brother Philip, then Resident Ambassador at Augsburg, arranged for him to visit Italy. So off the stripling went, a gay intelligent youth who favourably impressed all those who met him. He kept a diary fitfully, which reveals a keen eye and an alert mind. He visited his brother at Augsburg. At Füssen he noted, "Here bee Bellies of Lutes made in most perfection and from hence sent to Venice and sundrie other places."

Presently he came to Padua, where life was gay in a city thronged with students and foreign visitors. He went on to Mantua to witness the arrival of the Prince of Spain.

"There was great preparation for the reception of him. He was met three or four miles out of the town by the young Duke of Mantua, accompanied by the Cardinal his uncle, his two brethren and other noble men. He made his entry an hour within night, riding under a canopy borne by four horsemen. There came with him more than a thousand on horseback. His guard followed him afoot. Before him went thirty or forty handsome young gentlemen, clothed all in white vellvete, townsmen everyone, with a great chain of gold about his neck, a white staff in his hand."

The Prince lodged at the castle, its chambers hung with rich arras, and slept in a bed "covered with cloth of gold set all with perles." The next day the Duke of Ferrara came to salute him, but the Prince was haughty. "He made small countenance to any of them, whereupon he obtained through all Italy a name of insolence."

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Thomas Hoby was in Venice in January 1549, where he witnessed the entrance of Duke Maurice the Elector and the Cardinal of Augsburg. "They were honourably received and greatly banqueted on the Signory's charge. When supper was done they came both with other company in a maskery and danced with the gentlewomen a good space." That Shrovetide Venice was in carnival mood for the "lusty young Duke of Ferradin," who "showed great sport and much pastime to the gentlemen and gentlewomen of Venice, both on horseback in running at the ring with fair Turks and Corsairs, being in a maskery after the Turkish manner, and on foot, casting of eggs into the windows among the ladies full of sweet waters and damask powders."

Eggs soft or hard boiled, one wonders. And how did the ladies at the windows like it? Were they so full of 'sweet waters' that they were insensible to the egg throwing? Alas, the merriment ended in tragedy. One night, at a banquet at Murano, where now the tourist is mercilessly decoyed to visit the glassworks, the young Duke was murdered. The Duke, masked, and accompanied by friends, "went (as the manner is) to a gentlewoman whom he most fancied among all the rest." Then in came another company of Venetian gentlemen, of whom one also went to the same lady and asked her to dance with him, "and somewhat shouldered the Duke, which was a great injury. Upon that the Duke thrust him from him. The gentleman out with his dagger and gave him a stroke about the short ribs with the point, but it did him no hurt, because he had on a jacket of mail. The Duke, im-

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mediately feeling the point of his dagger, drew his rapier, whereupon the gentleman fled into a chamber there at hand and shut the door to him. And as the Duke was shoving to get the door open a varlet of the gentleman's came behind him and with a short sword gave him his death-wound, and clove his head in such sort as the one side hung over his shoulder by a little skin. He lived about two days after this stroke. There was no justice had against this gentleman, but after he had a while absented himself from the city the matter was forgotten. The varlet fled, and was no more heard of. This gentleman was of the house of Giustiani in Venice."

A tragedy in real Venetian style, with Italian dagger-work true to form ; but we wonder a little at anyone living for two days with only a piece of skin connecting his head and body.

What a continuous pageant Venice provided for visitors and residents in those days ! It was still the Venice of Gentile Bellini, of Paris Bordone, Carpaccio, Giorgione, Palma Vecchio, Tintoretto, Titian and Veronese ; of Andrea Palladio, working on the Ducal Palace and the Redentore ; of Antonio da Ponte, making the Rialto Bridge, of Sansovino in all his glory, building the Loggia, the Library, and the great colonnades of St. Mark's Square. Venice still held Cyprus in the teeth of the covetous Turk, and in her streets walked Marcantonio Bragadin, the future brave governor of Famagusta, destined in 1571, in violation of the terms of surrender, to have his nose and ears cut off, to witness the stoning, hanging, and dismemberment of his gallant comrades, the massacre of the women and

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children, and, in turn, to be hung by the hands in the public square while he was slowly skinned alive, whereupon the skin was stuffed, paraded in the streets and finally hoisted to the mast-head of the galleon of the the ferocious Mustapha and taken as a trophy to Constantinople.

But all this was in the near future, as also the resounding victory of Don John of Austria at Lepanto, which severely checked the Mohammedan power. In the time that Thomas Hoby was in Venice this great Republic was approaching the apex of her glory. "This is the most triumphant city that ever I saw," had written an ambassador in 1495.

The women of Venice, in Thomas Hoby's time, played their hands in intrigue. Their elegance was incredible, their morals also. The Republic admitted to 11,654 courtesans. It was a dangerous place for a well-bred attractive youth of nineteen. Hoby stayed for the Festival of the Ascension, and saw the Duchess of Urbino enter the City by sea, being met by the Bucintoro, the great state barge of the Doge. The Signory and two hundred gentlewomen accompanied her to her husband's palace. "There might a man have seen the sea almost covered with sundry kinds of boats, some made like ships, others like galleys, some other like pinnaces richly decked within and without, besides many other pretty vessels full of minstrelsy, dancing, and maskeries."

Hoby left Venice in August, 1549, and began an extensive tour of Italy. He arrived early in 1550 in Rome, and here the paths crossed of two men very different in calling and destiny. Cardinal Reginald

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Pole's mother had been taken from Bisham Abbey, thrown in the Tower and executed. Her body was laid to rest at Bisham beside that of her husband, Sir Richard Pole. Their arms to this day may be seen in a window of the Council Chamber. The Abbey, confiscated by Henry VIII from the Poles, was given to Anne of Cleves, and in later years was to be the property of Philip and Thomas Hoby, and to remain in their family for over two hundred years.

We have already heard Cardinal Pole's version of the manner in which he failed to be elected Pope. Mr. Thomas Hoby, by a strange chance, is in Rome this same year and gives us his version.

"And we tarried the longer to see if the Cardinals would elect a new Pope. It was thought Cardinal Pole should have been Pope. If he had received the Cardinals' offer over-night, as he intended in the morning following, he had surely been so. And in the morning when all the soldiers of Rome, and a great multitude of people besides, were assembled in the Market Place of St. Peter's to have seen Cardinal Pole proclaimed Pope, he had lost, by the Cardinal of Ferrara his means, the voice of many Cardinals of the French party . . . Don Diego laboured what he could to make him Pope, and so did all the Imperial Cardinals that were within the Conclave, but the French party were against him . . . there was no one in the whole Consistory that was generally so well beloved as he was of them all."

Pending the result of the Conclave, Hoby and his companions departed from Naples. From there he went through Calabria into Sicily, and was restrained

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from ascending Etna—"the cold so extreme that I should not be able to bring my purpose to pass." He returned by boat to Naples, visited Amalfi, and was splendidly entertained by the young Marquis of Capistrano. "Whitehorn and I were led into a chamber hanged with clothe of gold and velvet; wherein were two beds, the one of silver work, the other of velvet, with pillows, bolsters and sheets curiously wrought with needle work."

He left Naples on April 26th, 1550, and just before his departure witnessed the arrival of Prince Andrea Doria's great war galleons come from Genoa. He was back in Venice at the end of July but did not tarry, and pressed on to Augsburg where he joined his brother Philip, who was awaiting relief in his post as ambassador at the court of the Emperor Charles V. They travelled home together down the Rhine, and there is a joyous entry closing the diary for 1550. "Upon Christmas day in the morning about nine o'clock we arrived at the Court, the King lying then at Greenwich. That morning we came from Dartford, where my brother saluted by the waye the Lady Ann of Cleve."

Was it, then, at Dartford, one wonders, that the proposed exchange of a house in Kent for Bisham Abbey was discussed by Philip and the ex-Queen?

Thomas Hoby went abroad again in 1551, this time to France, with his brother, in the train of the Marquis of Northampton, to invest the French King with the Order of the Garter. He visited the Court of Henry II at Chateaubriant, where, he relates, the King, "showed my Lord Marquis great pleasure and disport, sometime playing at tennis, sometime in shooting, sometime

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in hunting the boar, sometime in palla malla (the game which gave name to Pall Mall), and sometime with his great boisterly Brittans wrestling with my lord's yeomen of Cornwall, who had much ado to get the upper hand of them."

Hoby was back in England in time for the landing of Mary, Queen of Scots, the Elder, who was conducted by barge to the Court at Westminster. This river work appears to have been too much for Hoby. "This season coming up and down by water and attending at Hampton Court for the Queen's arrival, it was the occasion unto me of a quartan ague which held me a good space after." This "quartan ague" was probably our modern scourge, influenza.

In 1552 Hoby was abroad again with his brother, sent on a mission to Calais. He settled himself for a time in Paris and there he made his translation of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* which he described as "The Courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio, divided into four bookes, very necessary and profitable for yonge gentelmen and gentelwomen abiding in court, palaice or place, done into Englyshe by Thomas Hoby."

It was not printed until nine years later, by "William Seres, at the sign of the Hedgehogge, 1561," when it had an immediate success and ran through four editions. Thomas again joined his brother Philip, at Brussels, in 1553, where they received news of Edward VI's death. They were home in September and went to the Court at Richmond to show Queen Mary the presents they had received from the Emperor, Philip having received a chain worth a

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thousand crowns. It was a time when the executioner's axe was busy: Northumberland, Suffolk, Northampton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lady Jane Grey, Sir Thomas Wyatt, among many, lost their heads. The Princess Elizabeth was sent to the Tower.

Sir Philip seems to have thought it prudent to ask leave to take the waters abroad, and in May, 1554, he set forth, accompanied by Thomas, to take the baths at Caldiero, near Verona. Sir Philip visited Cardinal Pole at Brussels, "then lying there as Legate from the Pope . . . who entertained him very gently," and he travelled on to Louvain in the company of Sir Thomas Chamberlain, the Ambassador, whose ancestral home was at Shirburn Castle in Oxfordshire. At Augsburg they received tidings of the arrival in England, and the marriage to Queen Mary, of that Prince of Spain whose arrival at Mantua Thomas had witnessed.

In September the brothers made their way home again, down the Rhine. Some of the penalties of travel in that age may be gathered from the fact that the transit of the Rhine involved no less than twenty-five custom tolls, levied by dukes, bishops, and barons living in their river castles. At home terrible news greeted them. The burnings and executions were in full spate. Bishops Gardiner, Ridley, and Latimer were burned, "and manie at London; and great prosecutions there was for God's Woorde." Bloody Mary was justifying the epithet of history.

The brothers were at Bisham for the Easter of 1556, and the new building operations were begun in the Countess of Salisbury's old home the following year.

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IV

And now we come to a little problem of history. There is a well-established legend that the Princess Elizabeth, later the great queen, was in gentle custody for three years at Bisham Abbey. Thomas Hoby married a daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, a great scholar, who was tutor to Edward VI. Thomas Hoby's wife had two sisters, by marriage Lady Bacon and Lady Cecil, and these ladies, it was said, were given charge of the Princess Elizabeth, whose head was by no means secure during her sister's reign.

They did not care for this task, and transferred their trust to their brother-in-law, Thomas Hoby, at Bisham. "In this way Elizabeth came to spend three years here, when the bow window in the great chamber was thrown out for her and the dais erected sixteen inches above the floor." So runs several of the historical accounts of Bisham Abbey and, further, we learn—"That her residence at Bisham was not disagreeable is seen from her speech to Thomas when he first went to court after she became Queen. 'If I had a prisoner whom I wanted to be most carefully watched, I should entrust him to your *charge*; if I had a prisoner I wished to be most tenderly treated, I should entrust him to your *care*.'"

The room, known as Princess Elizabeth's Council Chamber, has an oriel window, with a dais. That Queen Elizabeth used it when visiting Bisham cannot be doubted, but was she ever there as a prisoner? Sir Philip died in May 1558, and Thomas succeeded and married the next month. In November of the same year Queen Mary died and Elizabeth succeeded.

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Lady Bacon and Lady Cecil had been Thomas's sisters-in-law for only the last six months of Mary's reign, when Elizabeth might have been entrusted by them to Sir Thomas. Was she ever in the charge of Sir Philip? It seems unlikely. He acquired Bisham in 1552, but was repeatedly abroad, and only began his building operations on the old Abbey in the spring of 1557.

It is noteworthy that Thomas in his diary makes no entry regarding the presence of the Princess Elizabeth, which he surely would have done had she been at Bisham in the charge of his brother or himself. Moreover, we know that she was in the Tower in March 1544, was then transferred to Sir Henry Bedingfield's at Woodstock, and at Christmas was at her sister's court. In the autumn of 1555 she went down to Hatfield, and was living there in confinement when Queen Mary died.

It does not seem possible, therefore, for the oft-repeated legend of Elizabeth's confinement at Bisham to be true, despite the oriel window, the dais, and the reported conversation with Thomas on his first going to Court.

It is sad to kill a legend, but truth must be served first, and Bisham Abbey is rich enough in historical incidents without claiming to have held Elizabeth captive. And we shall see that she came later and appreciated the noble old house.

On Thomas Hoby's marriage and succession he continued the additions to the Abbey, which were finished in 1561 with the new lodgings. He divided his time between going to Court and entertaining at

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his house. In 1560 his son and heir Edward was born, and Sir Philip's widow died, and in the same year the crenellated turret, from which the house flag flutters to-day, was built. In the next few years he made a garden, planted an orchard, brought water to the house, placed a fountain in the garden, and erected the gallery in the great hall "with noble men's armes." He continued in the favour of the Queen, being well placed for influence, for Cecil, later the great Lord Burghley and real founder of the illustrious house of Cecil, had married a daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke's, accounted the most learned lady of her time, and Cecil was thereby Thomas's brother-in-law.

Queen Elizabeth knighted Thomas one Sunday, March 9th, 1566, at Greenwich, and a week later appointed him her ambassador at the Court of the French King. He had a rough crossing to Calais, where a soldier at the town gate shot through his flag. He demanded redress and obtained it. In Calais he walked abroad with a French officer, noted that the town since its recapture was being newly fortified, and despite the Frenchman's wiles, insisted on walking further. "Sir, there is no passage any further, for there be certain things that way not for any stranger to have sight of," confessed the embarrassed Frenchman. From these incidents the new ambassador deduced "somewhat hereby of a hard beginning." He was in Paris in April and presented his letters to the King. He described the interview.

"The King, at the opening of the letter, in stretching it out plain to be read, tore out a good piece of it, whereat the Cardinal of Lorraine smiled and seemed

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to make scoff, and standing not far off, the better to decipher . . . cast continually a glance upon her Majesty's letters." (How vividly we can see the scornful, inquisitive Cardinal reading over the King's shoulder! Sir Thomas was not the man to let him profit by his insolence.) ". . . which when I perceived I prevented him and somewhat (as it were unwitting of it) put myself between the King and him to stop his sight."

He performed his ambassadorial duties in May and June, but his last letter was written in Paris on June 21st, for he fell ill and died on July 13th, 1566, at the early age of thirty-six, having made his will only the day before, directing that his body should be conveyed to Bisham Church, where he was buried on September 2nd.

Poor Lady Hoby had to transport her household effects back to England. She sent in a long bill of expenses, "for carrying of my stuff from Paris to Bisham," and she was allowed "for 28 dayes dyett . . . until the seconde of September, on which daye my husbände was buryed," which seems to prove an official generosity that is not extended to the widows of state officials to-day. Queen Elizabeth wrote a letter of condolence that must have pleased Lady Hoby.

"For yourself we can but let you know that we hear out of France such singular good reports of your duty well accomplished towards your husband, both living and dead, with other of your sobre, wise and discreet behaviours in that Court and country, that we think it is a part of great contentation to us and a commendation of our country that such a gentlewoman hath given so

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manifest a testimony of virtue in such hard times of adversity."

Lady Hoby and her two sisters were all most remarkable women. Lady Bacon was the mother of Francis Bacon, and Lady Cecil was the mother of Robert Cecil. Lady Hoby's son, Edward, was therefore cousin to these brilliant young men. Lady Hoby at the time of her husband's death had three children, Edward, the heir, and Elizabeth and Anne, who both died in infancy. Soon after her husband's death she gave birth to another son, known later as Sir Thomas Posthumous. In Bisham Church may be seen the splendid Italian alabaster tomb she erected over the bodies of Sir Philip, her brother-in-law, and Sir Thomas, her husband. They lie in full armour side by side, bearded handsome men, in the special Hoby chapel she built in 1600. The inscriptions in Latin, Greek, and English were written by herself. But who was the excellent memorialist, T.B., who wrote the obituary in verse of the gallant brothers?

*. . . Philip, the fyrst, in Cæsar's Courte hath fame
Such as tofore fewe legates like possest,
A diepe discoursing head, a noble brest . . .*

runs the tribute to the elder, and turning to Thomas, says :

*a faithful frend,
Wel lerned and languyed, nature besyde
Gave comely shape, which made ruful his end,
Sins in his floure in Paris towne he died,
Leaving with child behind his woful wief,
In foreign land opprest with heapes of grief.*

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Lady Hoby's own Latin epitaph ended :

*Give me, O God ! a husband like to Thomas,
Or else restore me to my husband Thomas.*

Her prayer seems to have been answered satisfactorily in regard to the first part, for eight years later she married Lord John Russell, and by him had three children. Dashing, handsome Sir Edward Hoby, was her only surviving son, whose delightful portrait, at the age of eighteen, hangs in the Council Chamber at Bisham Abbey. He married twice, without offspring, and was succeeded by a natural son, Peregrine, and became celebrated as a diplomat and writer.

Lady Hoby was a lover of pageantry. She ordered a splendid tomb for Philip and Thomas, and a splendid one for herself. In a letter to the Garter King of Arms she asked what number of mourners were due to her calling, how many waiting women, pages, gentlemen ushers, Lords, and gentlemen, and concluded, " Good Mr. Garter, do it exactly, for I find fore-warnings that lead me to provide a pick-axe."

But her fame rests on a gruesome legend. She is the Bisham Abbey ghost who comes down the tower and haunts a room, wringing her hands. The legend is that she flogged her child, William Hoby, to death because he blotted his copy-book.

As I sat in the large panelled dining-room and looked up at the Holbein full-length portrait of her, dressed in the coif, weeds, and wimple of a noble widow, a dark awesome painting with a white thin face emerging, and cruel attenuated hands, I confess I thought the lady quite capable of the deed. My hostess and her

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daughter were at first a little reticent on the subject. They cautiously waited until the butler and maids were out of the room, knowing how ghost-ridden servants are—though the butler derides the whole haunting business in the servants' hall—and then narrated a few stories of the lady's alleged visitations.

There was the maid of an American visitor who fled because a hand plucked her bedclothes in the night, and yet another maid of another visitor, occupying the same room, whose experience was the same. The library door, too, has a habit of opening on its own account, for it is down to the library that the sinister lady comes. Lady Vansittart-Neale relates a story of a lusty young man, who was rowing at Henley Regatta and who, a member of the crowded house-party, had been given a shake-down bed in the library. At breakfast he appeared very perturbed, confessed to a visitation of the ghost, and making an excuse, left the house hurriedly, in a state of nerves.

"What had happened?" I demanded, breathlessly.

My hostess's daughter looked at me with a slightly derisive eye and answered—

"He had beautiful curly hair. Lady Hoby approached him and said—'Young man, if I but touch thee, thou wilt be bald.' He fled, gave up rowing, and entered the Church."

The ghost it seems has an eerie habit of appearing in the reverse, the black part white, the white black. Certainly Holbein's portrait of Lady Hoby is somewhat spectral. Did she flog her child to death? The tradition is there, very soundly established, and about 1840 there was some curious corroborative evidence.

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A corner of the dining-room having given way, part of the floor was taken up and a quantity of children's copy-books of the time of Elizabeth were discovered, pushed with rubble between the joists of the floors. A passage leading down to the river was also discovered. There was enough rubbish, old papers, and copy-books to fill two clothes baskets.

Mr. George Vansittart's mother visited the house the day after the discovery and examined the copy-books, which were all signed by various members of the Hoby family and corrected by Lady Russell. "In one, of William Hoby, I think, every leaf had some blot," wrote Mrs. Vansittart. "I wanted to take two or three away with me that day, but my sister-in-law wished to keep them all till Admiral Henry Vansittart had examined them. When I asked for them, all were missing, they suddenly had disappeared, supposed to be sold by the workmen."

V

Miss Vansittart-Neale, while taking me over the house, a labyrinthine place, asked me if I would like to visit the room in the turret where the child had been imprisoned and in the window of which a light was sometimes seen from the river. I assented eagerly.

"I shan't tell you which room it is—you can tell me if it registers anything. Some people sense it." We climbed the turret, and visited several rooms.

"Well?" asked my guide.

"Nothing yet," I replied.

"You've just been in the room—that's it."

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"Then I can't be psychic," I said.

We climbed to the top of the turret and emerged on its wind-swept platform, looking down on a maze of tiled russet roofs, with a splendid panorama of the dense woods on the steep hillside, the wide silver Thames moving through lush meadows, Marlow, mellow-roofed in the distance, and the Chilterns rising mistily to the north. It was then, as the wind whistled by the flagstaff, and I looked down on lawns, church, dove-cote, stables, and cottages, toy-like below, that my guide told me the story of another prisoner in the tower.

The Earl of Salisbury had a daughter, a nun in the Marlow Convent. She met his squire one day about to depart to the Holy Land. He persuaded her to elope, and they tried to escape in a boat but were taken at Marlow. She was sent to her convent; the squire was locked up in the tower, whence he tried to escape by means of a rope made from his clothes. It broke, he was dreadfully injured and taken into the abbey, where he afterwards became a monk.

"Well, it's a better story than you get in most operas," I observed.

"We have a real tragedy. A dog got locked out up here. It jumped and we had to have the poor thing destroyed," said Miss Vansittart-Neale. "And now are you tired?"

"No—is there any more to see?"

"We've only just begun."

We traversed corridors and corridors. I looked into one small bedroom, very old. As I stepped in I experienced an extraordinary sensation. I felt the

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floor might sink. I took a deep breath and came out hurriedly. My guide looked at me curiously.

"Then you've noticed it?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes—what an unpleasant sensation. What is it?"

"We don't know. But no one will sleep in that room a second night. These rooms were part of the monks' dormitories."

"Some things happened in that room," I said, glad to be out of it.

"Perhaps."

We hurried on, and came into a brighter room over the entrance porch.

"Something did happen here in 1840—we found Spanish doubloons, a bag full of them, under the floor. They bore the heads of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain."

It was this king and queen who sent Columbus on his great voyage to discover the New World, and it was to their Court that he returned bringing gold, cotton, strange plants, birds and beasts, and Indians for baptism. Immeasurable wealth was at Spain's command, and the English captains began looting the Spanish galleons laden with treasure. From what such raid had come these doubloons? Who owned them, who had hidden them for some reason in this room over the Abbey porch? It was treasure-trove indeed, and as such the Crown claimed it, and the Abbey had to buy back some of the coins for its own possession! There were also discovered a set of baby clothes and a pair of infant's gloves. The baby clothes are about the period of 1650, fine linen, with Hollie point lace, and were probably worn by one of Pere-

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grine Hoby's six children. They look as fresh to-day as when they were worn.

We continued our tour, through the rooms that had been built one into the other, sixteenth-century brick imposed on fourteenth-century stone. Parts of the old Abbey are built of chalk, as durable as stone when laid the right way up, but friable otherwise.

We came to Lady Vansittart-Neale's bedroom. It was once the Tapestry Room and leads out of the Council Chamber. It was for the walls of this room that Sir Thomas cut the tapestries of Tobit, now hung in the Great Hall, and over the mantelpiece are the arms of himself and his wife.

"Would you like to see the secret room?" asked Miss Vansittart-Neale.

There could be only one answer to such a question. A door opened behind a chest of drawers and a narrow staircase was revealed. Originally, access to this had been obtained from within the great fireplace, a safe device, particularly when a fire burned on the hearth! We climbed the stairs and emerged into the secret room. But it was not a room. It was a long hall, magnificently timbered, that ran over the whole length of this wing of the house. It was exactly as if an old wooden battleship, the *Victory* or *Bellerophon*, had been turned upside down, its vast hull forming the timbered ceiling. We walked down this secret attic under the Abbey's tiles. A hundred men could have been quartered there. Every one of its great rafters was a superb piece of oak. Dumb with amazement, I followed my guide down the staircase again, thinking how many 'old world' apartments some

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interior decorator would itch to create in that noble attic.

We now entered the Council Chamber, perhaps the loveliest room of the house, not excepting the Great Hall, with its exquisite oriel window looking on to the woods, and its tall window commanding the lawns, Norman-towered church, and river. The windows are rich in ancient glass, the arms of former occupants of the Abbey, or those associated with it, the arms of Montacute, Cecil, the Poles—the Richard who married Lady Margaret Mary Plantagenet, later Countess of Salisbury, the Cardinal's mother—all with rich quarterings denoting alliances with the great families of England. There are delectable portraits also, and one must pause before that of young Sir Edward Hoby, a dandy with a rake to his hat, and two delightful portraits of his sisters, Elizabeth and Anne, who died aged seven and five respectively.

The room is called 'Princess Elizabeth's Council Chamber,' and I have thrown doubt on the Princess ever having been there. But she came as Queen, and other Royal visitors preceded her. Henry VIII held councils in the room. "To-morrow in the morning," wrote a courtier to Cardinal Wolsey, from Wallingford, on July 14th, 1518, "the King departeth to Bisham as itt is tyme, for they doe die in these partes in every place not only of the small pokks and mezils but also off the greate syknesse."

Henry was frequently at Bisham, which he appears to have liked, and to have given to his former wife, Anne of Cleves. The Privy Seals show that he signed documents there in 1543, and there are household

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accounts for the Queen. When Elizabeth held a Court at Bisham in 1592 there was a Privy Council with the Lord Treasurer, the Lord Admiral, and Sir Robert Cecil present, and among the business was "payment of Raleigh's sailors," "Lawlessness in Lincolnshire," an Irish land case, and that of "Thos. Marlin, a Merchant in London," in difficulties. 1592 was the year in which Raleigh had been recalled by Elizabeth from a raiding expedition on the Spanish galleons. He was accused of having seduced one of her maids of honour and was put in the Tower. The Privy Council had the task of paying off the sailors of that cancelled expedition.

There was an account this same year "for making readie my Ladie Russell's house at Bissham for her Majesty by ye space of six dayes in August."

On the occasion of this visit the Queen was splendidly received. At the top of Bisham Hill, cornets sounding in the woods, "a wilde man" came forth and made a flattering speech. In the middle of the hill sat Pan and two virgins. The Queen stopped to listen. "We attend a sight more glorious than the sun rising. What, does Jupiter come this way?" The Queen passed on. At the bottom of the hill, Ceres, with four nymphs in a harvest cart, met the Queen and sang a song of honour. On arrival Lady Russell (Hoby) received her, and Sir Edward, the son, entertained her.

Was it on this occasion that she bathed in the spring in the ground, which became known as Queen Elizabeth's Bath? It may be so, but a waggish historian wrote "the water of this spring is remarkably cold,

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too much so for general use as a bath ; perhaps it was the use of such waters that accompanied that frigidity of constitution our Virgin Queen was so famous for."

It was this spring, with miraculous properties which, as early as 1385, caused an indignant priest to report to the Bishop of Lincoln that diabolical and execrable people were venerating this spring, over which a bird, which allowed itself to be touched, had built a nest, and people were putting offerings in the nest, instead of in the church box. There was a blear-eyed old man who said his eyes had been healed. This competition was too much for the bishop, who declared the waters to be in no way miraculous, and pronounced adoration and offerings to be a scandal and a pernicious example to the faithful. Therefore, to save them the 'wiles of the serpent,' he had the spring filled up with stones and the bird's nest destroyed. But in spite of threats of excommunication "certain sons of the devil from Wycombe and Marlow" cleared out the stones and set the spring running. The distraught priest again appealed to the bishop, but the spring and its reputation were too much for them. It still runs ; the old wives still believe in it. When the water was analysed in 1905, the analyst declared it owed "its healing properties to suspended gases."

Lady Russell died in 1609. In the church that stands so pleasantly on the bank of the river, she has a splendid memorial next to that erected to Philip and Thomas Hoby. It is canopied and carries thirteen coats of arms. She is kneeling, clad in her weeds and wimple, as in the Holbein portrait, nicely balancing a coronet on her head. Before her, opposite the prie-

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dieu, kneels her daughter Anne, also balancing a viscountess's coronet, as Lady Worcester.

At Lady Russell's feet there is a bundle in which we can distinguish two tiny feet emerging from petticoats. This represents her son Thomas, by her second marriage. If this child was the eldest of her second family, then he died at five, and may have been the victim of the legend, but if he was really an infant, then the legend has no foundation whatever, as Lady Hoby's male children by the first marriage were Sir Edward and Sir Thomas Posthumous, who grew to manhood. And, in any case, who is William Hoby, the reputed child victim? No William ever existed, and it seems as if the whole legend, and the ghost, must go overboard. One is reluctant to say this, but there it is!

Behind Lady Russell rank her sons, Sir Edward and Thomas Posthumous, and her three daughters. It is a memorial worthy of a lady who liked ceremony. Sir Edward, too, inherited the family sense of display, as may be seen in the remarkable memorial to his first wife, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth, "never mother, and the best wife." It is an obelisk, at the base of which are four swans, and on the top of which is a flaming heart.

Sir Edward Hoby lived till 1617. He was knighted on the day of his marriage to Margaret, of the flaming heart. As a youth he went to the Court at Scotland and James VI took an immediate fancy to the dashing handsome lad. Queen Elizabeth disapproved of him, perhaps for the same reason, and he tactfully pleaded ague and stayed from Court. But in 1588 she chose

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him to report on the progress of the preparation against the Armada, and he was present at the defeat of the Spanish fleet.

As we have seen, she visited him at Bisham in 1592. He married twice, without obtaining children, but he had a natural son, Peregrine, by a mistress. He recognised the boy, and made him his heir. Edward's brother, Thomas, 'Spindleshanks,' as his mother called him, also died without issue, and his wife briefly appears in contemporary records as having a passion for sermons and devotions. When she was in town she always went to hear the celebrated Mr. Egerton "in a little church or chapell upstayres at Blackfrairs, where he had a great congregacion, especially of women." In the country she kept a chaplain—"there is much psalm-singing in the household."

The last male heir of the Hobys died in 1766 and soon afterwards the Vansittarts came to Bisham Abbey, thus maintaining to this day the tradition of domestic occupation since 1338.

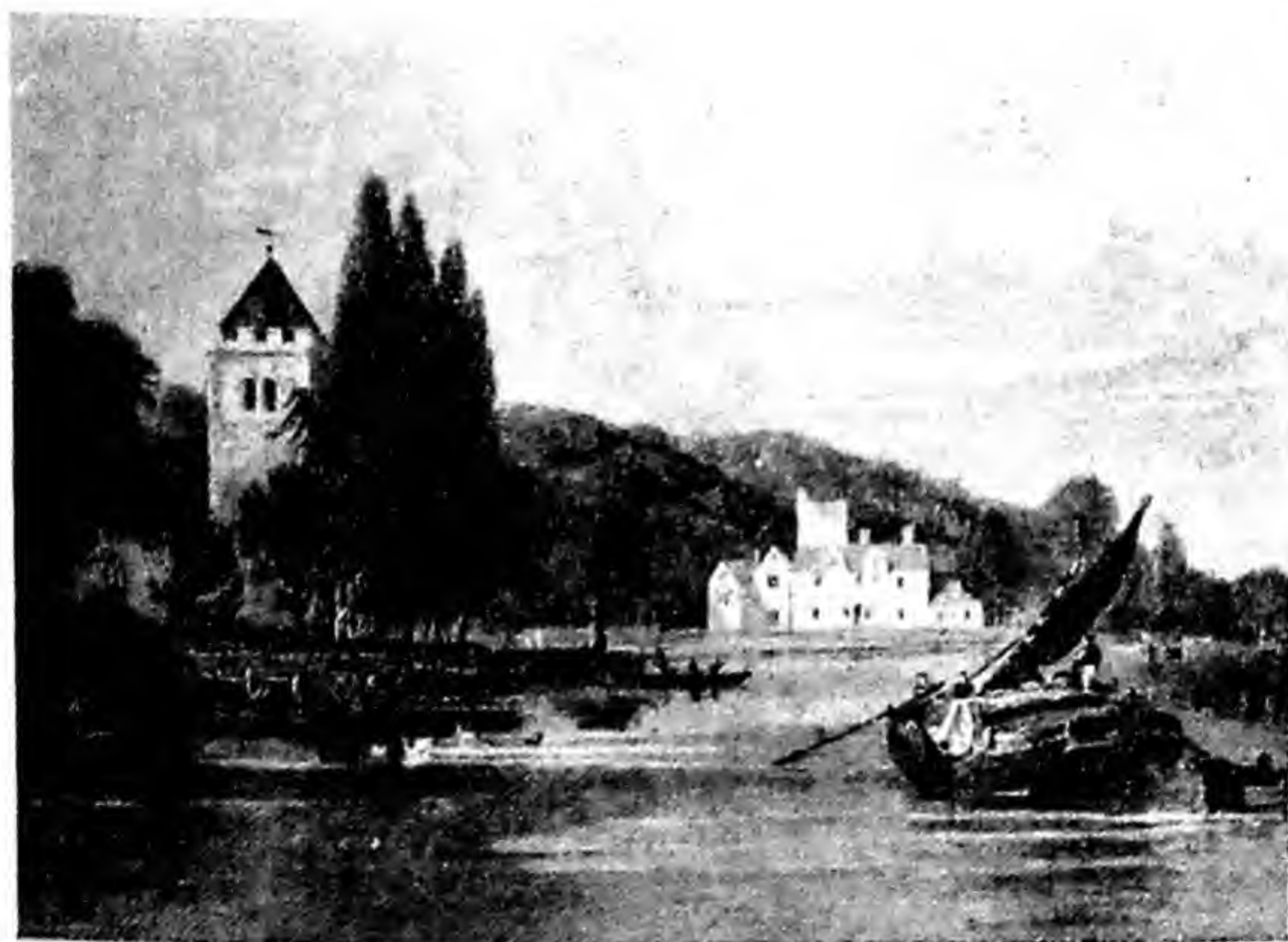
We are back in the Great Hall at last, with its great roof timbers, thirty-five feet long and a foot thick. The light from a blazing log fire illuminates the face of my hostess as I take leave. Away there in the shadows by the screen, under the nobleman's gallery, the butler waits with my overcoat. His feet move over stones where Warwick the King-maker lay entombed. A hundred ghostly faces peer at the living in that hall of long memories, tragic figures in the pageant of England's chequered history. As I pass out through the heavy old oak door into the entrance

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porch, with its vaulted roof, I almost hear on the stone-flags the stirring of the guard come to take the aged Countess of Salisbury to the Tower and the headsman's block, or is it a sound of horses, a cavalcade of courtiers preceding the advent of the Virgin Queen? The very threshold is thronged with historic shadows.

But I must linger no more in this old house which, with its rooms, its church, barn, dovecote, and stables clustering by the placid Thames at the foot of these Berkshire woods, constitutes an epitome of all we mean when we speak of this England we are heirs to.

Somewhere a bell tolls four o'clock in the misty October afternoon. I must hurry on to Marlow, where I have promised to take 'a dish of tea' with Mr. Pinfold.



BISHAM ABBEY AND CHURCH.

DEATH OF AN OLD GARDENER

Death came for old Reuben

*At the hour of four,
He did not ring the bell,
Nor tap on the door.*

*"Come with me, old man,
Come away," said He,
"You had almost slipped
From my memory."*

Said old Reuben Pace—

*"Since you are so late
It will not harm you
A while to wait.
The 'rrhinums want bedding,
The lupins want tying,
And the lawn must be mown—
It's no moment for dying!"*

*So Reuben went forth,
At the hour of eight,
To the potting shed—
But Death would not wait;
He took him suddenly,
Trowel in hand,
Ready to garden
In another land.*

CHAPTER VIII

LADYE PLACE

I

I PICKED up the telephone, just as coffee was brought in, to ring up my friends at Ladye Place, some five miles away, at Hurley.

"Mrs. Rivers-Moore is not in, sir, to-night," came a voice.

"Oh—when do you expect her in?" I asked.

"I don't quite know, sir—she's at a supper party in Paradise."

Again I said "Oh," this time a little louder.

"If you like, sir, I can take her a message—it's only a few minutes away."

"No—no, thank you. Ask her to ring me up when she returns."

"Very good, sir."

I put down the receiver. So they had supper parties in Paradise, I reflected. And when Mrs. Rivers-Moore rang me she would be newly returned from there. I poured out my coffee and reflected it was, after all, appropriate that one who lived in a Priory eight hundred years old should be able to go in and out of Paradise so easily.

But let me explain. Some two miles up the Thames from Bisham Abbey, on the same side, where a number

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of islands break the stream, one comes to Hurley Priory. It stands below the small hamlet wherein *The Bell*, dating from 1420, is a famous old hostel, once used by pilgrims to the Priory, and now used by motorists who find it a convenient 'run-out' from London. Unless one knows of it, Hurley is easy to miss, being hidden away off the main road running from Maidenhead to Henley. A bathing-pool has given it a somewhat perturbing popularity, and I often wonder if the monks turn in their graves, conscious of the nymphs who trouble the waters they fished in.

An archæological family lives at the present Ladye Place, once the farmhouse of the Priory. They give parties, but with the glass of sherry you receive a spade and are invited to dig, for their lives are spent in an archæological quest. They are bringing the old Priory out of the ground, a great task pursued with intelligence and zest. When you call on the Rivers-Moores you most likely find the Colonel bespattered with dust and mortar, up a ladder, restoring a beam in a Tudor barn, or his wife on her knees in a hole, digging at the base of a buried column. They will be polite but keep on working. When you have five hundred years to dig down through you have no time for trivial gossip.

Miss Whissitt goes there to dig and comes back breathless, physically and mentally, for the Colonel and his wife accept help from all quarters, including members of the Society for Psychical Research. Thus it happens that the digging party may find itself following a 'communication' from an Abbot, who

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'passed over' five hundred years ago, but who is still actively interested in the proceedings.

As early as 1086 Geoffrey de Mandeville founded a Benedictine Monastery at Hurley. It was a cell of Westminster Abbey, and the story of his gift proves that not all second wives are jealous of the first. Geoffrey, who fought at Hastings with William the Conqueror, buried his first wife in Westminster Abbey, and mourned her deeply, whereupon Leceline, the second wife, suggested that it would be a nice act for him to found a monastery, a cell of the Abbey, at his Manor of Hurley, where there was already a Saxon church in which Edith, the half-sister of Edward the Confessor, lay buried.

St. Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury and nephew of the Conqueror, consecrated the united church and priory. To this day the chapel of the Priory remains as the parish church. The Benedictines whose Order ruled there took the lead of all other Orders in England—they were scholars, schoolmasters, scribes, and agriculturists. Wherever they carried the Cross they carried the plough. The Priory they built at Hurley consisted of a quadrangle of buildings, with the old Saxon church forming one side, a refectory on the north side, and the Abbot's lodgings connecting them. It is on the site of these lodgings that a house, taking its name from the quadrangle, called Paradise, now exists. On the evening when I telephoned, and received the singular information that Mrs. Rivers-Moore was dining in Paradise, it was a reference to hospitality being dispensed in this building, whose windows now look out on the pleasant lawns where

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once Lord Lovelace's Elizabethan mansion proclaimed his state.

The monks seem to have had a very pleasant life in a most tranquil and lovely setting. They had their moat, fishponds, kitchen garden, barn, dovecote, and home farm. A beautiful reach of the Thames connected them with Henley, Medmenham Abbey across the river, Bisham Abbey and Marlow. They looked on to the hills where Geoffrey de la Pole lay ensconced at Bockmer—he leased his Medmenham half of the river for salmon fishing to the monks at twenty-six shillings and eightpence a year—and when they heard the dinner bell they left their fishing, gardening, or farm work and trooped into the Refectory. The Thames was a river in the proper sense of the word ; they could drag their nets between Temple and Medmenham and have a fine haul of salmon for dinner.

The Refectory still stands, redeemed from its ignoble use as a stable for the Lovelace mansion, much the same as when it was strewn with rushes, and the marshal, holding his wand of office, led the monks in to dinner. The monastery beer was notoriously excellent, home-brewed, and was consumed in moderation.

The marshal who led them in came of a long sequence of an elected order ; he was also the village blacksmith. He was entitled to the use of a meadow at a rent of twopence, one penny for his services, and on his part, besides a blacksmith's work, contracted to carry the wand, to scrub and brush the Refectory floor, to strew it with fresh straw from the barn, and rushes

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from the fish ponds, receiving the old straw and brushings for himself. His other perquisites were all the worn-out shoes and nails from the monastery horses he shod, and a snack of bread and convent beer. All this was written down in a solemn contract.

The Refectory in which the monks fed is seventy-two feet in length and thirty-eight feet wide and is Norman in the lower part ; the upper part is fourteenth century. The Gothic window arches, though formed of chalk, are as fresh and durable as the day they were erected. There is some indication of a place where a pulpit stood, from which one of the brethren read to the rest during meals. The hall would hold at least two hundred people, though there were probably never more than fifteen monks in residence.

Besides the Refectory the monastery possessed a bakehouse, a brewhouse, a kitchen. There was a secretary, a sacristan, a chamberlain, and a cellarer. A cooper, carpenter, tailor, tiler, smith, fuller, and dyer were on the estate.

The day's routine at the Priory was as follows. The brethren rose at six and went to Mass. Breakfast followed, and then they began their work. Perhaps one illustrated a manuscript, another taught small boys. The sacristan attended to the church, the camerarius looked after the rooms, the miller went to grind corn in the Priory mill on the Thames by Mill Lane.

Busiest of all was the woodward, or forest keeper. Henry III had granted a charter of special rights in the forest. The monks were freed from the obliga-

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tion to cut their dogs' feet (*de canum expeditatione*). This operation consisted of the cutting out of the ball of the dog's foot by the owner for the protection of the King's game from pursuit. In the case of a mastiff the three claws on the right side of the forefoot had to be cut off by the skin every three years.

And now let us follow the columbarius to the dove-cote. This is still one of the glories of Hurley. The Bisham dovecote is in excellent preservation, but the Hurley one gains by its size and position. It is built of stone, eighty-eight feet in diameter and twenty-three feet in height to the eaves, the walls are three feet six inches thick and have been buttressed at the four cardinal points, and it has red tiles. The door-jambs and lintel are of later period. The lintel carries the initials C. R., and the date, 1642, the year in which King Charles I raised his standard and opened the Civil War. The dovecote belongs to the Decorated period, about A.D. 1300, and that it was thriving a few years later we know because of a curious bargain made by John Terry with the Prior in 1389, by which he was to receive a pension and two hundred pigeons.

The dovecote originated with the Romans, and the columbarium was found on many Roman estates. The keeping of pigeons was at its height in the middle of the seventeenth century, when there were some twenty-six thousand dovecotes in England. They were not popular with the farmers and peasants, for the doves batten on the scanty crops. Only the lord of the manor or an abbot could have a dovecote. It was first introduced in England by the Normans, and was part of

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the feudal rights of the overlords. The Norman dovecote was a massive circular building, and the English dovecotes followed the same pattern, but were smaller.

Let us go inside the Hurley dovecote with the columbarius, Brother Stephen, who is crossing from the Priory into the field where the dovecote and the great flint tithe-barn stand near each other. Our monk is a young man, and his girdle encircles a slim waist. He is chosen because he has some climbing to do, and he carries a large egg-basket.

Inside, the dovecote is a little like an astronomer's observatory except that the tent roof has no opening for a telescope. But in the middle, rising to the roof, is the stout trunk of a tree which acts as a mainmast to two yard-arms, one three feet, and one twenty feet from the ground. These yard-arms are not set over each other—the upper one is several feet behind the lower, in order that a ladder supported at their extremities shall have a convenient slope for the egg-gatherer who mounts it.

This pair of yard-arms, with their ladder, revolve like a swinging gate about the main post, and as the extremities are within a few inches of the wall of the dovecote it is possible for the monk up on his ladder to swing himself right round the building. He can thus, at any height or place, visit the tiers of nests and collect the eggs. On the inside walls of the dovecote there are some six hundred niches, or L-shaped nests, made of chalk, in fifteen tiers, and the pigeons, entering by the cupola on the cone-shaped roof, fly down and lay eggs in the nests, to which access by the collector

is made simple by the 'potence,' as this revolving ladder is called.

The dovecote was a very important institution in an era when food could not be obtained from cattle. There were few cattle kept through the winter months, for agriculture had not solved the problem of growing winter food. Thus it was that November, in ancient times, saw a great slaughtering, as the Anglo-Saxon name for November "blodmonath" denoted. The meat thus provided was salted down, and fresh pigeons in the winter months were a very welcome change, apart from the eggs. The dovecote was doomed when the turnip and swede for cattle winter-food were introduced into British agriculture early in the eighteenth-century, and the rising power of the farmers, who protested against the filching of their corn, gave the final blow to pigeon-keeping.

When Henry VIII confiscated church property and abolished the monasteries, Hurley fell under his ban. In 1536 Westminster Abbey was made to concede Covent Garden in London for Hurley Great Wood. In 1539 the Crown swallowed up Westminster Abbey's lands and properties, including its cell, Hurley Priory. It was the end of the monastic system, and when the abbeyes and priories were not conveyed to private owners for secular purposes, as at Bisham Abbey, they fell into ruin.

Little by little the layout of the ancient Priory is being uncovered by Colonel Rivers-Moore. On the north side of the chancel a twelfth- or thirteenth-century pavement of patterned tiles has been dis-

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covered, and below the floor level, at a depth of three feet, several burials have been found.

II

We will now go underground, having crossed the pleasant lawns in front of Paradise, which has at either end a blocked-up window, one looking into the church, the other into the Refectory. Presently, we descend into an ancient crypt, with heavy groining of very fine brickwork. Here, in 1888, three bodies of monks clad in Benedictine habits were discovered.

But what shall we make of another discovery, the body of a man nearly seven feet high, in a state of perfect preservation, except for the feet, which were missing? Were the feet cut off to shorten the grave, or does the mutilation give colour to the gruesome legend that the monks who deserted their Order were, on capture, liable to have their feet cut off?

The crypt of this monastery has seen some strange events. There is a little chamber that one cannot doubt was once a prison cell. There was an iron ring in one of the walls and two iron hinges seem to have supported a strong door. Who was locked in there; recalcitrant monks or unfortunate serfs? Henry VI, in 1236, gave the Priory the rights of 'infangentheof' and 'outfangentheof,' which meant that the Prior had the right of taking and sentencing a thief within and outside the manor. We know from a record that one, John Whytyng, was taken for the theft of a hog and was imprisoned by the Prior.

The fate of this crypt has been a strange one. It

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was once part of the foundations of a vast mansion. After Henry VIII appropriated the Priory it became, by the grant of Queen Elizabeth, the property of Leonard Chamberleyn, of an old family long established at Shirburn Castle near Watlington. From Chamberleyn the site, now called Ladye Place, by reason of the Priory having been dedicated to Our Lady, passed to a John Lovelace, who went on an expedition with Sir Francis Drake against the Spaniards, and came home with so much loot from the Spanish galleons that he built himself the great mansion of Ladye Place, on the ruins of the old monastery. Was he, one wonders, the gentleman who hid a bag of Spanish doubloons at his neighbour's, Sir Thomas Hoby's?

The son of the buccaneer, Sir Richard, was raised to the peerage, in 1627, as Lord Lovelace, Baron of Hurley, and the family grew to riches and power, and in the succeeding reign lived in great splendour. The second Lord Lovelace's cousin, Richard, was the cavalier-poet, who wrote *To Althea from Prison*, and one other deathless lyric, *To Lucasta, going to the Wars*.

It is John, the third Baron, who made history in this crypt in the foundations of his mansion. He resisted the illegalities of James II and espoused the cause of William of Orange. He was distinguished for his taste, his love of splendour, and, above all, his passionate whiggism by which he supported a revolutionary movement to make the Crown subordinate to Parliament. He was many times arrested for political offences, and was brought before the Privy Council for

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examination. The evidence against him was insufficient and he was dismissed, to the anger of King James, who exclaimed, "My Lord, this is not the first trick that you have played on me." "Sir," answered Lovelace, boldly, "I never played any trick to your Majesty, or to any other person. Whoever has accused me to your Majesty of playing tricks is a liar."

The King had every reason for being suspicious. Lovelace, a rake and a roué, had been the boon companion of the Duke of Monmouth, the natural son of Charles II, who had been encouraged in his debauchery by the reckless Lovelace. Monmouth ended on the scaffold, where his manly conduct somewhat retrieved his abject behaviour when pleading for his life before his uncle. Lovelace ended a wild career by falling down the staircase of his town house and breaking his neck, after drinking his daily three bottles of brandy. He broke his neck once too often, for there had been a former occasion when, riding to his country house from his Oxford college, he had broken his neck by a fall and would have died had not a friend immediately replaced the dislocated spine by a tremendous pull.

Lovelace was one of the ringleaders of the Revolution of 1688. Macaulay described the meeting-place of the plotters, after alluding to Ladye Place, "that rose on the ruins of a house of Our Lady in that beautiful valley through which the Thames, not yet defiled by the precincts of a great capital, now rising and falling with the flow and ebb of the sea, rolls under woods of beech round the gentle hills of Berkshire. . . .

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Beneath the stately saloon, adorned by Italian pencils, was a subterraneous vault, in which the bones of ancient monks had sometimes been found. In this dark chamber some zealous and daring opponents of the government had held many midnight conferences during that anxious time when England was expecting the Protestant wind."

The invitation to William of Orange to invade England and depose James went forth, and Lovelace and his conspirators, some of the leading nobles of the kingdom, were among the ringleaders. The subterranean vaults of Ladye Place were well suited for secret plotting. A large sewer or tunnel ran from *The Bell Inn* at Hurley to the mansion. Another large sewer, in which it was possible for a man to pass, ran from the crypt, under the lawns, down to the moat that communicated with the river. The place can still be seen where a cannon, mounted in the sluice wall, commanded the main channel of those into which the river is here divided.

The conditions, therefore, were ideal in the matter of congregation and escape for men who were risking their heads. It is said that the principal papers which brought about the invasion by the Prince of Orange were signed in a dark recess at the extremity of the crypt.

Certain it is that, after William had ascended the throne, he visited Lovelace at Ladye Place and descended into the crypt to see the place that had aided his cause. Never was there a scene more suggestive of conspiracy.

When my hostess and I were underground, and, in

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the fading light, went from pillar to pillar under the low vaulted ceilings, I felt we ought to have worn muddied top-boots, great cloaks, and slouch hats. She did indeed have top-boots, not those of cavalier pattern, but of the kind that confer immortality on Wellington. (And why, by the way, are the names of the three great protagonists of Waterloo perpetuated in footwear? Blücher gave name to a high shoe, Wellington to a top-boot, and Napoleon to a high boot.) Our feet clattered over the dark pavement of the crypt. A bat scurried out at our approach.

"Hist!" I said, crouching.

"What is it?" exclaimed my hostess, halting and switching her pocket torch on me.

"Nothing—but I felt I had to say 'Hist!'—and ask the password," I explained.

"Then 'Sub-rosa.' That was the password," replied my hostess. "One theory is that it was chosen because the conspirators came here through the tunnel under the rose lawns, the other is that it was taken from a rose carved on the staircase by which access was gained from the house to the crypt, a rose being the ancient emblem of the monastery."

"I prefer the under-the-rose-lawn version—it's more wormy," I said, reading the inscription on a monk's grave. "I'm afraid the term didn't find birth here—it's as old as Cupid."

"How?"

"Well, there's the story that Cupid gave the god of silence a rose to bribe him not to betray the love affairs of Venus," I explained, "That's why they carved it on the ceiling of banquet chambers, to warn

guests that what was said *in vino* should be kept *sub-rosa*. And they put it over sixteenth-century confessional boxes also."

In that subterranean gloom, as we groped our way, I tried to imagine Lovelace counting the chairs for the next sitting of the 'We Want William Society.' Why couldn't he have conducted the business pleasantly upstairs, in one of the countless chambers of his vast mansion? But perhaps, then, as now, there was the servant problem, and the conspirators were nervous of what the butler saw.

Lord Lovelace himself nearly came to grief. On the eve of the landing at Torbay of William of Orange, he set off with a party of seventy followers, well-armed and mounted. I like to imagine him on an early misty morning in November 1688, riding at the head of his cavalcade past my cottage on his way to Torbay. All went well until he reached Cirencester, where the militia had been called out and he was told he could not pass. It became a case of fighting, or retreating, baffled in his purpose. He and his followers fought. After a sharp conflict they were defeated and made prisoners. One of Lovelace's young officers was slain. He bore the honoured name of Bulstrode Whitelock, and was the son of Sir William Whitelock of Phyllis Court, Henley-on-Thames. When on December 13th the triumphant Prince of Orange reached Phyllis Court and held there his first Court, the sad loss of his host's son must have clouded the proceedings.

Lovelace lived to drink another day. A man of unbounded hospitality, he filled Ladye Place with roysterers and squandered his large paternal estate.

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He was made Captain of the Band of Gentlemen Pensioners. Madcap adventures and heavy wagers finally compelled him to sell his unfinished riverside mansion to meet his debts.

Before his line ended it was destined to provide New York with a Governor, for the title went to John Lovelace, his second cousin, who married a Clayton, and died in America in 1709. With his son Nevile, the sixth Baron, who died in 1736, the original barony became extinct. The present Earl of Lovelace is in the descent, but through a female line, and it was into this branch that Lord Byron's daughter, Augusta, married and became thereby the Countess Lovelace.

The history of this house continued to be extraordinary in its subsequent ownership. It was bought later by a Mrs. Williams, sister of the Bishop of Rochester, who purchased two tickets in a lottery. One of them gained a prize of five thousand pounds, the other of twenty thousand pounds, with which she bought the property. Subsequently the mansion was inhabited by Admiral Kempenfelt, who was doomed with eight hundred men when the *Royal George* foundered in Portsmouth Harbour in 1782.

*Toll for the brave—
Brave Kempenfelt is gone,
His last sea-fight is fought,
His work of glory done . . .
His sword was in the sheath,
His fingers held the pen,
When Kempenfelt went down
With twice four hundred men.*

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Thus Cowper wrote, in a poem that for a century had a school-room vogue. The Admiral's brother was the last occupant of Ladye Place, and the brothers planted there two thorn-trees in which they took great pride. Returning at sundown one August day, the brother found that the Admiral's tree had withered away. "I feel sure that is an omen of my brother's death," he said, and later news confirmed his premonition.

Ladye Place fell into ruin after Gustavus Kempenfelt's death. A visitor in 1831 described it as almost past repair, and another visitor in 1838 wrote, "On revisiting this old spot I found that the mansion had entirely disappeared. In the centre of the lawn, where so late stood that noble pile, was a heap of bricks and stones, while beneath, small portions of the arched cellaring were still standing."

There was much more than a small portion; practically the whole crypt is there, but it may have been hidden by debris. The house which had been pulled down the previous year was never quite finished. It was imposing, but it was a labyrinth of rooms. The second story was adorned with Tuscan pilasters, the third with columns. It had a grand staircase, great marble mantelpieces, and mullion windows. The ceilings were embellished with plaster mouldings, of foliage, fruit, birds, and friezes of coats of arms.

But it was the great saloon upstairs that attracted admiration. This was more than sixty-four feet long and was decorated by landscapes on deal panels. The ceiling was attributed to Verrio, who worked at

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Hampton Court and Windsor Castle. As for the panels, opinions differ—they have been attributed to Salvator Rosa or Pietro Tempesta.

The mansion having been tenantless for many years, it was put up to auction in lots. At first it was offered complete for five hundred pounds, but in vain; it fetched one thousand five hundred pounds piecemeal, the neighbourhood competing for the ornamental portions. Now, not a brick of the Elizabethan house of the Lovelaces exists on the site. It is a singular story of the vicissitudes that human nature suffers. The piety of a Norman lord's wife founded the Priory, a Tudor king ravaged it, an Elizabethan house arose on its foundations from the piracy of an ennobled buccaneer, and his descendant plotted a revolution in the vaults of a priory founded for the very form of worship the revolutionaries were to overthrow! Finally, the great house and the family wholly disappear, and only one mouldering tomb in Hurley Church bears witness to the power and magnificence of the Lovelaces of Hurley.

A strange story like this should have a strange sequel. It has. Following up a remark of my hostess, I went to the post office at Henley. It is a comparatively new building. The walls are decorated in a rather singular fashion.

"What are those?" I asked, looking at some gloomy and maccabre landscape paintings, oddly in contrast to the bright, distempered walls.

"I don't really know. They say they were painted by a monk," replied the assistant at the counter.

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My excitement grew. I asked to see the postmaster. In his room there were more of these panels.

"Do you know anything about these panels on your walls?" I asked him.

"Very little," he replied. "When the Office of Works bought the private house formerly on this site, the owner made a curious condition in the agreement for the sale of the property. He stipulated that the panels on the walls of the house should be rehung on the walls of the new post office. What do you make of them?"

"Not much at present," I replied. "But will you do something about them?"

"Yes?" he asked, a little surprised. "What?"

"Will you ask the Office of Works to have them cleaned, and treated according to their deserts? Tell them they are by Salvator Rosa or Pietro Tempesta—I think the latter—and came out of the Elizabethan mansion of Lord Lovelace of Hurley."

In the dusk my hostess and I wandered over the lawns, looked back at Paradise, shining in the waning light, and at the old Refectory, its Gothic arches gleaming against their dark background as when the monks had trooped into their evening meal. We went on down the terraces by the water garden, spaced with Irish yews, black against the light-green lawns, and past a stone vase that recalled the Venetian Republic, coming to a woodland. From a rustic bridge we looked down the liliated moat and over the monk's fishponds. The crimson of the upper sky lay reflected

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there ; the russet of late autumn enriched the woodlands ; the old brick wall, with its ornamental gate, flamed with blood-red leaves, and through the wrought-iron lattice we saw the old river—' sweet Thames run softly till I end my song.'

How tall and majestic were the cedars, supposed to be descended from those planted by Crusaders from the holy land ! I turned and looked at this lovely old place, spread out on the bed of the river valley, with wooded hills rising around. The scene cannot have changed much since it enchanted Pastor Moritz on his way to Henley.

We went back to the house, once the Priory farmhouse, with its thick walls, wide fireplaces, and great beams, but first we visited the museum in the gallery of the Refectory where the Colonel has laid out his finds. Most of them have been dug up in the grounds, but one was most fittingly imported, for it is part of the mast of the *Royal George*.

There is more ship's timber in the house. Tradition says that when Lovelace broke up one of his ships at Portsmouth, perhaps one of the daring little band that raked the great galleons of the Armada, he brought the timbers to be used in building Ladye Place. When this was demolished some of the timbers lay in the tithe-barn, and, in modernising the Priory farmhouse, were used in the dining-room and for the mantelpieces.

"Just tap that," said the Colonel, as we went in to dinner.

I tapped one of the columns. It was like iron.

"There were a number of saws came to grief in

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cutting that wood. As for carving it, it's practically unworkable," said my host.

We seated ourselves. I expected to find a serving monk at my elbow as we sat along the Refectory table, but instead it was a very young manservant bearing the soup, conscious, I swear, of his first black trousers and white front.

"But the ghost—surely there's a ghost?" you exclaim.

Yes, there is a ghost, or there was—and this was the manner of it, and how it was laid.

Some thirty years ago, when Ladye Place changed hands, the new owner employed a firm of London decorators to make some alterations. Their workmen slept on the premises, but after the second night they declared they would stay no longer. In the middle of the night they had been awakened by a sound of scuffling, followed by a fearful scream. This had happened also on the first night. The foreman, incredulous and impatient with this story, declared he would sleep on the premises the third night. He did so and experienced the same appalling disturbance. By this time the workmen were certain the place was haunted, and went.

The owner, annoyed that anyone should believe such a preposterous story, called in a local contractor, Mr. Sergeant, of Henley, who cared nothing about ghosts, and declared they should not hinder the work. His men did not sleep on the premises. A few days later, when they removed some panelling on a closed staircase in the room where the nocturnal

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noises had been heard, an upright skeleton was found, and in the ribs a hunting knife, some six inches long, lay embedded. Colonel Rivers-Moore has the knife in his possession. It is of Elizabethan workmanship.



LADYE PLACE, S.E. FRONT.

PAVAN

(On seeing an impromptu dance by a poodle)

*Timorously treading, the curled darling goes,
A Harlequin dog, on delicate toes ;
Elegant gentleman !—do you suppose
He's a Prince of the Blood with his Bourbon nose?
Though ruffled, he dances with royal disdain
A pavan for a poodle, to music from Spain.*

CHAPTER IX

THE ROAD TO STONOR

I

I OPENED the lattice window that looked on to the road running up to Stonor and Watlington. The July morning was so glorious that I regretted my forthcoming departure for Austria. This life in the country presents many problems which I have not yet solved. The constant claims of a garden are fatal to week-end visits. If I go away this week-end I shall miss the apple blossom just at its best, if I go next I shall miss the golden rain of the laburnum, or the snowfall of the 'syringa.' If I delay longer, then the peonies will burst into blood-red flower, or the poppies lift their brief but glorious banners all in vain. No, not this week-end, nor next, nor the week-end afterwards can I go away. And thus a whole summer passes and I make no visits. My friends, a little hurt, shrug their shoulders and say—"Oh, he's a hermit—he won't leave his cottage."

There is the problem of the annual holiday, also. I am beginning to find I simply do not wish to go away, and, afraid that I am degenerating into a stick-at-home, I deliberately plan to leave for August and September, choosing a method that means I cannot stay at home. I lend the cottage to friends for those two months. Then I have to go.

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Looking out of the window this perfect July morning, through the boughs of an apple-tree whose fruit was just achieving its ruddy complexion, I reflected that next week at this time I should be in Salzburg, in a rabble of music-mad tourists vitally perturbed by Furtwängler's *tempi*, or intoxicated by the 'too-divine' conducting of Toscanini. I began to examine the process, the operation of the herd instinct by which I should allow myself to be jostled across Europe, to sleep in a strange bed at an exorbitant cost, and probably eat food that disagreed with me, when I might stay comfortably here, enjoying my garden in one of the best months of the year.

Well, it was no use repining. James Hilton and his wife were coming to Pilgrim Cottage next week, and if he wrote here a book one half as good as *Lost Horizon*, or one quarter as charming as *Good-bye Mr. Chips*, I should feel my absence had contributed to the delight of thousands. And as everybody said, with an earnestness that made me wonder whether I was becoming a trial, it would be good for me to go away.

But it was really provoking for the morning to be so lovely, so full of sunshine, of flowers and bird-song just when I had to think of leaving. Next year I——

The noise of hooves on the road warned me of an approaching cavalcade. It was only eight o'clock, with the dew on the grass and an early haze over the fields and woods. I thrust a semi-shaved face forwards, and saw six half-bodies hop jerkily along the top of my privet. As I expected, Mrs. Gallop was among them, a black starling among her robin-red-breast nieces.

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The road grew quiet again. There was a brief quarrel of birds over the hollyhocks. A garden-roller clanked somewhere. The whistle up at the wood-yard announced a halt in the business of reducing glorious beechwoods to brushbacks. Then quiet again. I scraped the second half of my face. This morning I ought to work on my new book. But I also ought to go up to Fawley and visit Mrs. Harman, who had reported that the gate to the field was falling down. I ought also to fasten up the vine along the house wall.

A car came rushing down the road. In the country every sound makes one curious. Was it the mad youth who drove with an open mouth and an open exhaust, was it the butcher's van on the morning round, or was it the A.M. and P.M. going to Henley market? For this was Thursday, and every Thursday they did three things. They went to the auction room near the station to see if there was anything worth 'picking up'; they went to a café, and steadily looked through all the weekly illustrated papers, while drinking a small cup of coffee; and then, punctually at twelve, they went to Reeves', the corn merchant, in Bell Street, and bought the weekly packet of bird seed for the aviary at Pages Bottom.

It was sad to think that soon they would no longer be able to go to that shop, dim, double-windowed, with corn bags along the floor, a time-worn counter, great scales, sleeping cats, and the two brothers slowly serving in the gloom. There had been Reeves' corn shop in Bell Street for sixty years. The shop itself had been there for about two hundred years, and no one could

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remember when there had not been the two bachelor brothers, slowly moving, slowly weighing, slowly talking. They had been the unofficial chroniclers of the town's life for half a century. In the back room that looked on to a surprisingly large lawn with rose trees, they would produce old books and prints of Henley town, faded photographs of dead worthies and characters, and fat, time-yellowed albums of cuttings from the local press reporting Queen Victoria's wedding, her Jubilee, the horrible murder in the wood, Mr. Councillor Smith's oration at the Sunday-school treat, the new gas lighting in the town, the visit of the Princess Helen Victoria.

Yes, they knew and loved their town as few others, and my insatiable curiosity never wearied them. They opened boxes, peered into racks, or produced old deeds, documents, and books illuminating some question I asked.

Then, one day, Miss Whissitt came with sad news. Reeves' corn shop would be no more. The property had been bought. It might be pulled down, or suffer radical alterations and have a bright new face, but no soul within, for the Reeves brothers would not be there with the bags of corn in the dark doorway, and the scales and the cats and the old desk. I was stunned, and hastened to Bell Street. It was too true. They were disposing of their fittings.

"Would you like that?—you can have it for a pound," said one of the brothers, opening the lid of a long box with inlaid flowers. He moved something, and an enchanting tinkle came out. It was a musical box.

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“Certainly, I’ll take it!” I said at once, catching my breath, for it was the most wonderful musical box I had ever seen. It had a long brass roller, it had seven golden bells, like Turkish mosques, struck by hammers in the form of butterflies, bees, and wasps, with their wings spread. It had a device, that, applied, produced different instruments, mandolines, piccolos, or harps, pingy harps such as tired angels might play. All this was under a glass lid. On the outer lid was a list of the eight tunes in a coloured surround of edelweiss, snowy peaks, fir woods, cherubs, and a mountain shepherd waving his hat. I wound it up and played it, my friends wound it up and played it, until I had to lock the lid for fear its teeth would be worn away. I wrote to my former secretary, Louis Tissier, now working in Paris, he who had bought me the musical bird in the cage, and the musical photograph album. “I must come to see it soon,” he answered solemnly.

I thought of this corn shop, and the musical box and the A.M. and P.M. as the car approached. But it was not theirs. Instead it was a large van-like car, with curious brightly varnished wooden sides, a drop end, and a hooded driving seat. It might have been a delivery van, or a horse-box, or an ambulance. But I knew from experience it was none of these. It was Lord Camoys’ pantechnicon from Stonor Park, and what it was for or what it contained I was never quite sure. Sometimes it was crammed full of young people, lively shoots from the Stonor family tree, sometimes a dark-eyed girl drove it, or a youth in a gay check suit half-leaned out of it, or a red-faced groom, or a

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blue-uniformed chauffeur seemed to be in charge. What did it take up and down that road—the laundry, hacks, cattle, guests from the station, or, maybe, Lord and Lady Camoys themselves? For over two years it had been a wonder-box passing gaily under my window. It was difficult to realise that from this window of mine Stonors could have been seen going up and down that road between their home and Henley for the past three hundred years; they had, in fact, been traversing that road, on foot or by horse, for over six centuries!

II

The Stonor family was living in the village from which they took their name, Stonor, four miles up the road past Pilgrim Cottage, early in the reign of Edward I. The grandson of the Richard Stonor who flourished in 1290, and was the owner of Bix Bottom where Miss Whissitt now lives, became prominent, as the Chief Justice of the Common Pleas. This Sir John de Stonor founded the fortune of the family. He became a trusted servant of Edward II, and in 1325 was sent on a mission to treat for a marriage between the Prince of Wales and Eleanor, Alfonso XI's sister, and between the Spanish King himself and Edward II's daughter.

It must have been a bleak journey. He reported from Valladolid in Easter week that for eight days his embassy could do nothing owing to Alfonso's illness, but when he did see him "he bore himself well and seemed in good health." Like most men of those turbulent times, Sir John suddenly found himself

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thrown into the Tower, but after a short imprisonment he was restored to office. A prudent, trustworthy judge, he amassed wealth and had five or six sons. His house at Stonor Park was already a considerable mansion with a private chapel, licensed in 1349. His grandson, Edmund, married the sister of the Waryne de l'Isle who rebuilt Shirburn Castle. Edmund's grandson, Thomas, much enlarged Stonor House. He procured Flemish workmen, and two hundred thousand bricks were brought from near Nettlebed.

Sir William Stonor, around 1490, seems to have improved the gardens and stocked the park with game and deer. The descendants of those deer raise their antlered heads and look at you with soft eyes as you motor up the long drive to the house. Leland, describing the place about that time, wrote—"The mansion place standeth climbing on an hill, and hath two courts builded with timber, brick and flint."

By now the Stonors, marrying shrewdly and adding manors to their manors, had become great land-owners. They held land in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Devonshire, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Lincolnshire, and Kent, and houses in London. We find them fighting in the courts more often than on the battlefields, for few of them were soldiers, and they kept away from Court whenever possible.

One of them, Sir William, had an unfortunate adventure. He was summoned to Leicester by Richard III, and, instead, joined Buckingham's rebellion. Buckingham lost his head, Sir William Stonor fled, and his

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estates were all confiscated. But on Henry VII's accession his property was restored, and he died a prosperous old man in 1494. This was the only time the family came near to disaster. Sir William was the first of the family to go into trade, despite the fact that his mother was a de la Pole, the natural daughter of the Duke of Suffolk. He performed some remarkable acrobatics on the social ladder. As a youth he was lively, and his riotous conduct got him into disfavour with his uncle, Humphrey Forster of Harpsden Court, whose ploughman he menaced "so that the pore man stode in grete fere." He married money first, taking to wife Elizabeth Ryche, a prosperous merchant's daughter, who was a widow with three daughters.

The wealthy Elizabeth, with alliances in the wool trade, was a promising catch for a great sheep grazier like Stonor. She married for social distinction, he for business. It was satisfactory in every way. Her brother-in-law, Thomas Stonor, it is true, sniffed at her. "I marvel greatly what moveth him to say such language by me as he doth," she protests.

She went much to London, and to Court, enjoyed herself, and kept a keen eye for business. She also caused her husband to receive a profitable wardship after the death of Richard Quatremayne of Shirburn Castle, and altogether her connections proved of great use to Sir William. She was manifestly fond of him, and the affairs of the house of Stonor are vividly reflected in the letters that passed between them. We probably owe the preservation of these delightful letters to Sir William's attainder in 1483, when his

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papers were confiscated, perhaps in the search for treasonable matter. The papers were preserved in the Tower, and they have since proved a gold-mine for students of the domestic history of the fifteenth century.

One can imagine the commotion that ensued in the household at Stonor Park when the King's officers came and confiscated all the family papers. Perhaps the appearance of these officers provided the first news of the master's attainder. Up till then the Stonors had always kept out of trouble. It is a curious fact that in this old prominent family so few of them did any military service. They were pacifists almost to a man and left fighting to others. They evaded the Wars of the Roses until Sir William fought at Stoke for Henry VII. His father twice ignored Edward IV's summons to the field. Except for these brief and reluctant appearances in armour they were all stay-at-homes. In the mass of their letters they are the historians of birth, marriage, lawsuits, business, and death, battles being singularly and refreshingly rare.

If we cannot love this Elizabeth, it is impossible not to admire her energy. She was the kind of wife who would see that William's underwear was aired, or a hot bottle put in his bed. William seemed to delight the ladies. We find the Duchess of Suffolk ready to assist her "right trusty and entirely beloved ffrende Wylliam"—the same thrice-married Duchess Alice for whom the Earl of Salisbury had uselessly provided a place in his tomb at Bisham. That William often needed money appears clear from the bond he

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gave to Richard Fowler, Quatremayne's heir at Shirburn, when he borrowed thirty-three pounds for the space of thirteen days! So William married his heiress in the summer of 1475.

Sir William's father had been happy in his marriage to the Duke's daughter. There is a letter in which she begs her husband to spend more time at home "that will be profit unto you and heart's ease unto me," and she continues, alarmed at the prospect of her husband taking in a lodger, one Lord Morley, "rather break up household than take in sojournants, for servants be not so diligent as they were wont to be." And poor Mistress Stonor, as many harassed wives have done for five hundred years since, made servant-hunting forays into Henley Town, and found one who was "a good cook as cooks go, and as cooks go, she went."

Joan had a temper, however, as son William knew to his cost. Not daring to face her on one occasion, he sent a parson friend. "I have been with my Mistress your Mother, and there I shall never come more, by grace of God, for I was false varlet, thief and her traitor, and, God give me grace, I never meet her more."

But William was soon standing on sound feet, by the aid of Elizabeth his wife. He entered into partnership with Thomas Betson, who was courting his step-daughter, Katherine. Betson became the representative of their wool-dealing interests at Calais, the headquarters of the wool industry, and therefore the centre of England's greatest export trade.

Betson was a faithful, good-hearted fellow. "Sir,

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you shall receive by the grace of God in John Somers' barge, now coming to Henley, a pipe of red wine," he writes, and, after discussing business in Calais, adds a postscript in which he speaks a word for his sweetheart "my gentle cousin and kind mistress Katherine Rich, to whom I beseech your mastership ever be favourable and loving."

Young Katherine was then staying at Stonor with her mother. She was only twelve, and in an age when women were little more than tokens of the dowries they brought with them, the Betson courtship is a pleasant interlude in the marriage market.

Somers' barge took five days to go from London to Henley, and he seems to have had something of a traffic monopoly. We learn of another journey on which his barge carried for Mistress Stonor a bag of spices, two brasses, a pair of gloves, a gown of Padua silk and a mustard mill. Did the same barge carry the love letter whose fragrance comes to us down the centuries? Did the child rush to the gate when the carrier from Henley brought it on that last stage of its journey from Calais? How she would read and re-read this letter of June 1st, 1476! So Thomas had received her token!

"Mine own heartily beloved Cousin Katherine, I recommend me unto you with all the inwardness of my heart. And now lately you shall understand that I have received a token from you, the which was and is to me right heartily welcome, and with glad will I received it. . . . I understand right well that you are in good health of body and merry at heart. . . . And if you are a good eater of your meat always, that

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you might wax and grow fast to be a woman, you should make me the gladdest man of the world, by my troth ; for when I remember your favour and your sad loving dealing to me wards, forsooth you make me even very glad and joyous in my heart."

He had not, as might seem at first, a fear that she had become a vegetarian. In its archaic sense 'meat' denoted food of any kind. It was her appetite that was his concern.

" . . . and on the other side again, when I remember your young youth, and see well that you are no eater of your meat, the which should help you greatly in waxing, forsooth then you make me very heavy again. And therefore I pray you, my own sweet Cousin, even as you love me, to be merry and eat your meat like a woman."

He then becomes more playful, and asks her to greet his horse that carries her about. He has heard a rumour that she was in Calais looking for him, but it must have been in another Calais or surely he would have seen her. And, like lovers ever, he complains of the slowness of time before he sees her again.

" I pray you, gentle Cousin, commend me to the Clock, and pray him to mend his unthrifty manners, for he strikes ever in undue time, and he will be ever afore, and that is a shrewd condition. . . . I trust to you that he shall amend against my coming, the which shall be shortly with all hands and all feet with God's grace. . . . And I trust you will pray for me, for I shall pray for you, and, so it may be, none so well. And Almighty Jesu make you a good woman,

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and send you many good years and long to live in health and virtue to His pleasure."

And then he closes his letter to the maiden in England with a swift, glowing portrait that has never been bettered in literature :

"At great Calais on this side of the sea, the first day of June, when every man was gone to his dinner, and the clock smote nine, and all our household cried after me and bade me come down, come down to dinner at once ! and what answer I gave them you know it of old."

He adds a postscript that must have made her quickened heart beat quicker : "I send you this ring for a token."

Poor Thomas, he became fretful in Calais. Katherine was a bad correspondent. "I am wrothe with Katherine because she sends no writing," he writes to Dame Stonor. "I have to her (written) divers times, and for lack of answer I wax weary." He complains, a little peeved, "She might get a secretary if she would, and if she will not it shall put me to less labour to answer her letters again." He arrives in London from Calais, and she is not there to meet him. "If I had found her at home here," he writes to Dame Stonor, "my comfort should have been the more : but I thank God of all, my pain is the more : I must needs suffer as I have done in times past, and so I will do for God's sake and hers. I send my master a dozen quails to eat."

But he won his girl-wife at last, although there was deep concern over the trousseau—" . . . how I shall provide for them : she must have girdles, four at the

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least, and how they shall be made, I know not." They were married in 1478, lived happily and had two sons and three daughters.

Meanwhile Elizabeth Stonor, now a knight's wife, was busily managing her house. She is indignant with the bargemen that they have "been loth to take and receive any stuff of ours, I marvel greatly, for truly to my knowledge I had never thing carried by any of them but that I paid them truly therefore." Sir William does not seem to have been a good payer. "These county folk are sound, but terribly slow at paying up," I once heard a country grocer say. The habit seems an old one. "Sir, I beseech your master-ship that you will remember your bread baker at London, for he calls upon me daily for money, the which sum is 35s. 4d.," pleaded Sir William's servant.

Elizabeth died young, and Sir William looked for another wife. His uncle expressed an earnest hope that he would not have his house so full of "meny of boys," a gibe at Elizabeth's love of company.

This time Sir William married a Devonshire squire's daughter, and a great heiress. His first wife's relatives were not invited to call. But the second wife died a year later, and during her illness we find Master William Goldwyn writing her four prescriptions. He described himself as "maister of art and Bacheller of fysyk." There appears to have been no apothecary in Henley, since the prescriptions had to be made up at Bucklebury, some twenty miles distant.

After a month, Master Goldwyn prescribed again, and wrote "praying you to send me a buck at Wednes-

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day next coming, according to the promise that my Master and you made at my last being with you, for a special friend of mine shall be married on Thursday next coming, to the which I have promised a buck, wherefore I pray you that he be not disappointed." To this the enterprising family doctor added—"Madam, I pray you to speak to my Master for the sixteen pounds that is due unto me." We do not know whether he received the buck. We do know his poor patient died soon after.

For the second time Sir William was a widower without children, but richer than ever. He now stepped high, and married a wealthy widow a little older than himself. His third wife was Anne Neville, daughter of the Marquis Montagu, the brother of the King-maker—the brothers who fell at the battle of Barnet and were buried at Bisham. Anne presented Sir William with a son, Thomas, while staying at the Marquis of Dorset's. It was this marquis who was instrumental in drawing Sir William into Buckingham's rebellion, with such disastrous results.

III

The Stonor house still stands, the Stonor family still flourishes, the herd of deer still browse in the park, though whether a buck goes as a present to the family doctor, I know not. Through a female descent the barony of Camoys has been called out of abeyance. But little has changed. The long house of Tudor brick lies out along the hillside facing the valley, with terraced gardens behind, backed by noble beech-

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woods, as pleasant an ancestral home as any England can show.

I looked down the long portrait gallery that leads to a beautiful library. What a ghost-walk it would make! Lord Camoys opened a door. Perhaps now a spook-atmosphere would envelope us. Instead, jazz music smote our ears. The youngest representatives of the Stonors were fox-trotting where once Dame Elizabeth had rated the frightened parson.

Fortunate daughters to have been born in an age of jazz, when they would not be bartered like sheep in a farmer's cart, netted down with their dowries under the mean eyes of elderly land-grabbers, or worse, treated as Sir John de Camoys treated his wife, yielding her up to Sir William de Paynel. He made "over to Sir William all her goods and chattels, and consents and grants that she shall abide and remain with him during his pleasure," a proceeding pronounced invalid by Parliament in 1302.

This old house, set amidst such fine contours of wooded slopes, has long memories. There are many figures rise up before one as the staircase is mounted, the long gallery traversed. From this house went a man of unshakable conviction to a dreadful end at Tyburn, where he was hanged, drawn, and quartered according to the unspeakable barbarity of a felon's execution. This man was the Catholic priest and propagandist, Edmund Campion. After a brilliant Oxford career he was driven abroad for his conscience's sake, and returned again to serve his faith in circumstances that he knew must end in torture and death.

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At Stonor there is a priest's hiding-hole. I followed Lord Camoys up into a top front bedroom, in the Tudor portion of the old mansion. It is used as a bedroom even to this day. At the back of the room there is the slope of an attic roof, and low in the corner where this meets the wall, a secret panel falls back to disclose a small chamber, the priest's hiding-hole.

A great number of families, retaining the Catholic faith after Henry VIII's break with Rome, had equipped their mansions with these necessary hiding-places for a resident or an itinerant priest. Many an old Marian priest, driven out of his cure on Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne, lived on in private houses, performing his office, his presence disguised in the rôle of tutor, librarian, or secretary. In the priest's hole, usually large enough to permit him to remain in hiding for a few days while the house was being searched or watched, the Mass vestments, the sacred vessels, and books were stored in readiness for the erection of a secret altar.

The great Catholic families, in whose mansions the priests found asylum and a fervent congregation, were brought to the verge of ruin by fines, and their households were subject to raids. Queen Elizabeth had a trick of visiting a Catholic squire, accepting his hospitality, and then, summoning her host, sending him to jail, after soundly rating him for his faith. Whichever party was in the ascendancy, Catholic or Protestant, the name of religion provoked treachery, pillage, torture, and death. It inevitably produced men of conviction who faced martyrdom for their faith.

Edmund Campion was of this company. Hunted

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from town to town, his zeal seemed to thrive on the perils it invoked. In collaboration with another priest, Persons, he set about printing on a private press his *Decem Rationes*—his Ten Reasons for the faith he held. The difficulties of printing were very great. The press was moved from East Ham, and, the hunt getting closer, Persons removed it, with his workmen, to Stonor, where Dame Cecilia Stonor gave him a refuge. Here the booklet was printed. Five workmen under his control were arrested, but the booklet appeared at the Oxford Commencement on June 27th, 1581, and was in the nature of a bombshell with its adjuration—"Listen, Elizabeth, most powerful Queen . . . I tell thee ; one and the same heaven cannot hold Calvin and the Prince whom I have named."

During the completion of this booklet, which carried war into the enemy's camp, Campion was at Stonor, but he was soon on the move again, passing from house to house. He knew his doom could not be far off ; his followers were being arrested one by one. He had been back in England a year, evading arrest, but the informers were now resolutely tracking him after his audacious publication. He was to see Henley once again, a prisoner beginning his painful course to the gallows. He lay at Lyford Grange, near Faringdon, Berkshire. He held a Mass on the Sunday ; a spy gained admittance and a local Justice was informed.

The house had excellent hiding-places. The magistrate could find no evidence and retired, but came back again. A resolute search was made. Some members of the household were found in the dovecote.

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Campion and his two associates would have been safe, for the guard slept in the house all night and made an early morning search without result, but unhappily a chink of light over the stairs betrayed the hiding-place. A crowbar prized open the secret place. Campion and his associates were seized.

The three priests, together with a fourth, Filby, who unwittingly called at Lyford, and walked into the Sheriff's men, were taken to London. They rested at Henley on the night of July 20th. Their progress was watched with much secret sympathy. Persons, in hiding still at Stonor, had news of the sad occurrence, and contrived to despatch a servant, who reported that he found Campion very calm and on easy terms with his captors. He was allowed to ask to his table several members of the University.

Prisoners and guards retired to bed, but in the middle of the night there was an uproar. The guards were afraid that a raid was being attempted to release the prisoners, but it transpired that the unlucky Father Filby had had a nightmare—he had dreamed that the executioner was ripping open his body and disembowelling him. In the morning the sad procession left Henley.

Two nights later Campion was sleeping in the most miserable cell of the Tower of London. The road to the gallows was now before him and he took it unflinchingly until that terrible morning when he was dragged through London on a hurdle, baited and harangued at Tyburn before the bloodthirsty mob, and then hanged. Even at the very end he was the means of securing a convert, for during the disgusting

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scene when his entrails were torn out, some of his blood splashed a watcher's coat. The wearer was so wrought upon that he left England, and thirteen years later returned a priest, doomed to the same death on the gallows.

In that peaceful park where the deer browse, before the old house stretched along the hillside in the morning sun, before that opening panel in the top bedroom, the fate of this priest comes to mind, and the savagery of the times and Campion's end seem unreal, so tranquil is the scene. To-day, when the world has almost emancipated itself from the excesses of religious fanaticism, from the burnings, the rackings, the devilish ingenuities of man, as well as from the wars, the bloodshed, the intrigues, the political corruption, all engendered in the name of religion by triumphant and intolerant partisans of one creed after another, it is difficult to realise what men suffered in these places and scenes that reflect nothing of their agony.

The faith for which Campion laboured in secret at Stonor still continues to be preached in a chapel that one reaches by devious passages at the end of the old mansion, a chapel which holds the distinction, in Catholic eyes, of being one of three chapels in England that have never passed from the Church of Rome.

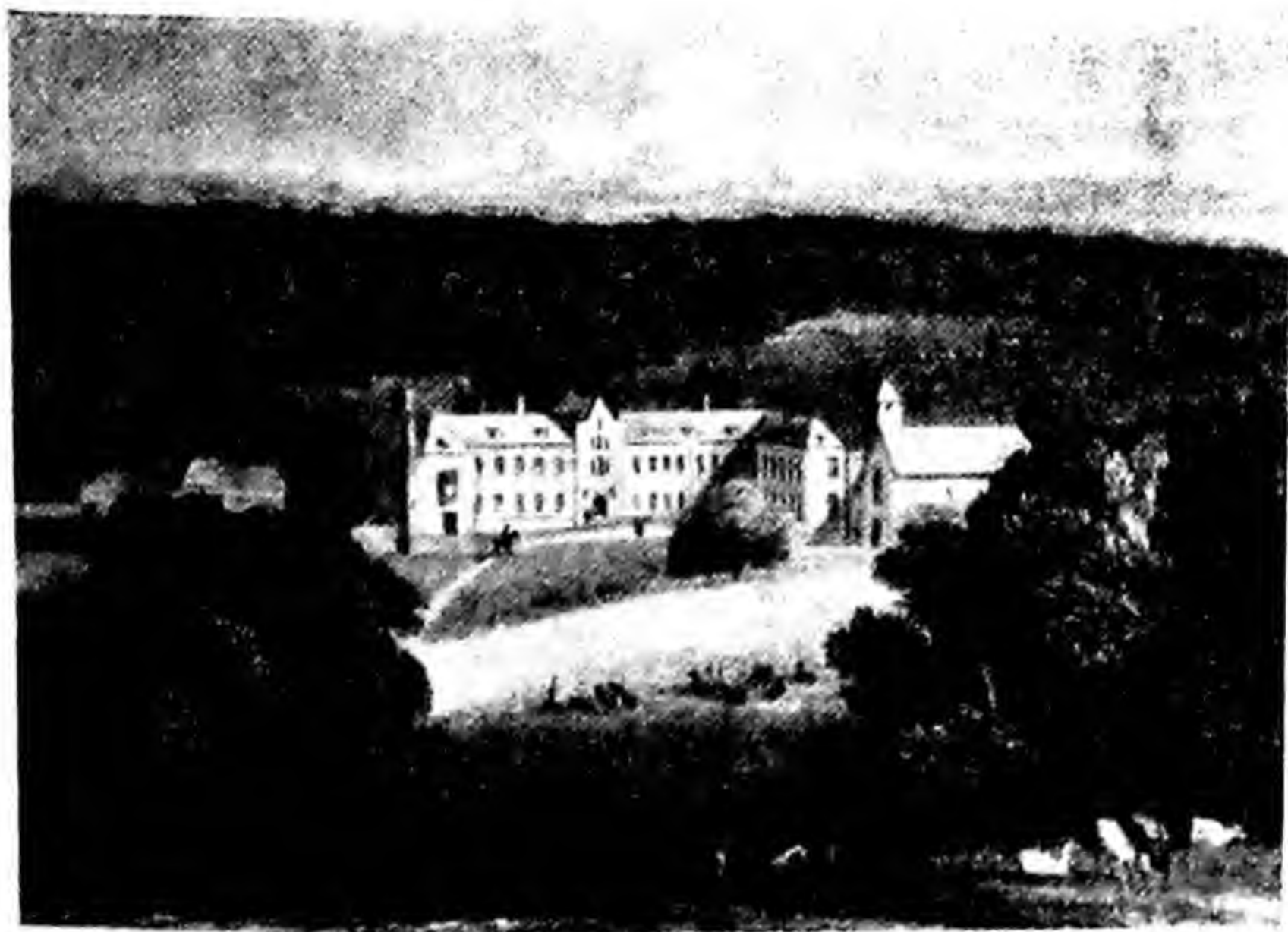
As I walked with my host across the court in front of the house, a car drew up and a man got out.

" . . . we can put a beam across. The roof will have to be gone over. They'll get on with the work to-morrow. It may be necessary . . ."

Such were the words that came to me as my host

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turned aside for a few moments. I said good-bye and got into my car, leaving them discussing estate matters in the morning sunshine. The car ran down the park to the gates carrying the heraldic stone lions, and, as I left this lovely domain behind me, I reflected that some such conversation as this I had overheard had taken place, periodically, between the lord of Stonor and his agent, for the last five hundred years.



STONOR HOUSE.

AFTER MIDNIGHT

*After midnight is passed and I hear the old clock below
Rumble and wheezily strike the hour of two,
When I am awake, and see, like a drift of snow,
The moonlight cover our bed, I turn to you,*

*Loved face ethereal, faint in the dusk of your hair,
And gently, half fearing to wake you, explore with
my lips
The curve where the shadow lies deep and your throat
lies bare ;
And the earth and the moon and my soul are in total
eclipse.*

*And I am adrift in deep fear that it cannot last,
Since love with his unclipped wings is so ready to
fly ;
O belovéd, if kisses were pinions to hold us fast,
No prisoners were ever so bound as you and I !*

*Now in the silence, ere earth turns eastward to dawn,
And stars grow brighter, and breathless night
grows older,
And black skeleton branches shadow the moonlit lawn,
I turn and am soothed to sleep on your snow-
white shoulder.*

CHAPTER X

THE COMING OF TARZAN

I

ON arriving back from Stonor that perfect July morning, I found Miss Whissitt emerging from the gate, with a startled expression on her face.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Roberts!" she said, a little breathlessly, drawing back into the garden. "I've had such a shock. There's a naked boy up your poplar tree!"

I looked at my poplars. True enough, the brown body of a boy was clinging half-way up the trunk of a poplar. He was not quite naked, he wore a girdle, but his tawny body gave him the appearance of a faun among the leaves.

"That," I explained, "is Tarzan."

"Tarzan!—but—do you know him?" asked Miss Whissitt, more wide-eyed than ever as the boy ran up the tree, like a squirrel, until it swayed dangerously.

"Tarzan! Come down and meet Miss Whissitt," I called.

The boy came swiftly down. How, barefooted, he could clamber up and down those trees passed my comprehension. But Tarzan's prehensile toes could break sticks and pick up things. I made the introduction, Tarzan smiled shyly, shook hands, and scampered off again.

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“Come in !” I said to Miss Whissitt.

Indoors she recovered breath.

“I’ve never seen anything so astonishing in my life ! *Jamais ! Jamais !* Why, that boy—but it’s Greece—Cupid—it’s like a Parthenon frieze. Such limbs, such a head, and the colour of him ! Who is he—where did you——”

“Do sit down,” I said. “You will recover in a minute. That is my gondolier from Venice.”

“Oh—he’s Italian ! That explains his wonderful colour, his eyes. But he can’t be old enough for a gondolier, surely ?”

“He’s nearly fourteen—and he’s not Italian. He’s the son of two proud parents who have given him a sister to match. Three years ago in Venice I used to see a boat go down the canals. All the world turned to watch. Psyche was at the prow and Cupid was on the poop. In other words, Tarzan and his sister were rowing their gondola with a grace that no professional could surpass. Psyche wore a tartan kilted skirt, and had cropped corn-coloured hair, and Cupid wore orange-hued shorts and a white vest. Their brown legs had never known shoes or stockings. Their mother made their scanty clothes and taught them manners to match their virgin beauty. All the English residents preened themselves because of those children. They took me about in their boat. I was adopted as an uncle. Scottish stock, the Italian sun, and Venetian lagoons have produced Tarzan. I promised Tarzan a holiday in England.”

“Oh, don’t let him ever grow up ! Keep him like that !” cried Miss Whissitt, still ecstatic.

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"Ah, if I could," I replied, quoting—

*Had I the power to Midas given of old
To touch a flower and leave the petals gold,
I then might touch thy face, delightful boy,
And leave a metal grace, a graven joy.*

"You wrote that?—how charming!"

"Alas! no," I replied. "One of your despised poets wrote it—Flecker. I wish I had the Midas touch, but Tarzan will grow up, and wear trousers, and a bowler hat, and carry an umbrella on the 9.10 to the City."

"Oh, what a horrible thought! A body like that should never be hidden in clothes—how awful to grow old!"

"The world has thought that for many thousands of years. That's why it makes me sad sometimes to look at Tarzan. I suppose every father knows such a moment."

"Can't we go out and talk to him?" asked Miss Whissitt.

"If you like," I said.

But in the garden we could not find Tarzan. He had disappeared. I called and called.

"He's up in the woods, I expect."

Miss Whissitt shook her head.

"You're wrong. I don't believe he ever existed—not as a human boy. We've seen a faun. *Vraiment!* I defy you to produce him!" she exclaimed.

"Very well. Come with us this afternoon. We're going on the river to Medmenham," I said.

Miss Whissitt accepted at once. "But what I

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really came about," she said, "was to give you the name of that Chinese shrub you wanted, the one that flowers in December, with white, scented flowers. It's *Viburnum Fragrans*—it's a joy for winter."

"Let me put it down. I couldn't remember anything for winter a day like this," I said, fetching a notebook.

Miss Whissitt spelt out the name. Hers was the only garden that seemed to have masses of flowers all through the year. I was determined not to look so barren this next winter.

"And the Winter Sweet—it's *Chimonanthus Fragrans*, it has pale yellow flowers stained purple, and you can grow it up your wall to seven feet or so. It's got a spicy scent, and gives you lovely cuttings for indoor decoration through the winter. Got that?" asked Miss Whissitt.

"Yes, any more to make winter floral?"

"Two more—a Spring Heath that flowers from November to April, crimson and white flowers, *Erica carnea*. And the Chinese Witch Hazel—*Hamamelis Chinensis Arborea*—it grows eight feet high and gives you scented buds in late autumn, and yellow flowers in January and February."

"It's sad to think I'm not going to see them," I said, when I had written all this down.

"Why not?"

"I'm going to Florida next January, and I shall be cantering down the orange groves."

"I don't think it's fair," said Miss Whissitt. "You're always going somewhere, bringing back Nymphenburg china, or tapestries, or Venetian fauns."

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"You forget," I replied, "that as an author I have to travel, or repeat myself. I have no gift for describing countries I have not seen."

II

At three o'clock we embarked. Tarzan, the launch's figurehead, perched on the prow. From time to time he dived in and played, dolphin-like, around us. Without apparent effort he slipped through the water, caught a water-hen, and, on one occasion, terrified Miss Whissitt by appearing with a water-rat in his hand. A flicker of golden limbs and he was gone again, only a ripple, torpedo-like, betraying his track.

"Wherever did that child learn to swim, *c'est incroyable !*" exclaimed Miss Whissitt, as we passed Hambleden Weir.

"In the lagoons of Venice," I replied. "Water is his element. Do you know, I'm nourishing a conspiracy against him?"

"Why?"

"Well, very soon a problem will present itself. He's nearly fourteen, and he can't go on much longer at an Italian school in Venice; his future must be thought of. Greek fauns have to go to the office and earn money."

The launch quietly slid down stream, through osiered islands by the Fish Weir. The water ahead was threshed into foam by a pair of brown arms. The silver mirror of the river had been broken by Tarzan. On our right the grass steps of Culham Court rose up from the water to the terraced lawns. Another stretch

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of beautiful river, a silver track through lush green meadows and sun-stencilled woods, brought us towards Medmenham. Tarzan had disappeared.

"I hope there's been no Hylas-business down stream," I said, after calling in vain.

Miss Whissitt looked a little mystified under her green parasol.

"Hylas business?" she queried, leaning forward to pull down a muslin skirt as she lay among the cushions. "*Je ne comprends pas.*"

"Young Hylas went to the pool for water, and was ravished by the naiads enamoured of his beauty. In other words, he was drowned. Goodness gracious, whatever's that?" I exclaimed, catching sight of a brick-and-marble monument on the bank opposite. On the top of this object, intruding on the quiet landscape, a naked cherub of bronze pointed triumphantly across the river, as though exclaiming, "I did it!"

"You may well ask," replied Miss Whissitt. "That's a monument to commemorate the victory of Groceries over Soap. A millionaire provision merchant established himself along the river bank here, and a millionaire soap merchant was established above him in an immense mansion of chalk. Groceries would not allow Soap to have access to the river. Soap bought the opposite bank and tried to suppress an ancient right of ferry. That started a terrific lawyers' battle, which ended with a verdict for Groceries enforcing Soap to maintain the ferry. When Groceries died he left a legacy of five hundred pounds to perpetuate his public-spirited action. The pointing cherub warns the ferry owner that Public Opinion has

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got its eye on him. That, of course, wasn't the end of the feud," went on Miss Whissitt. "Groceries never allowed Soap to get to the river except by making a long detour round his property, nor were the public, whose ferry rights he had so truculently defended, allowed to look at it. For nearly a mile he fenced in a public footpath and drove it underground through a tunnel. But the best hedge has a gap somewhere, and it's still a lovely walk."

A head appeared by the launch, shaking the water from its locks. Tarzan had returned from a sub-aqueous excursion. On a lawn before us, so well kept that it looked like a piece of stretched velvet, Medmenham Abbey appeared in view, an architectural reconstruction that justified its deceit by giving to the scene a venerable air of monastic traditions. Its predecessor, a derelict abbey, founded in this secluded spot by Cistercian monks in 1201, never greatly prospered. When Henry VIII's commissioners came to despoil it they reported, "Monks two; servants none, debts none; moveable goods worth one pound three shillings and eightpence, and the house wholly ruinous."

It had its hour of doubtful fame in the middle of the eighteenth century, when it became the headquarters of the Hell Fire Club. Over the door the members put the motto "*Fay ce que voudras*"—"Do as you please"—and proceeded to follow it out.

The club recruited its members from society bucks and roués. Everything was wrapped up in mystery. Workmen were secretly employed and hurried back to London, servants were forbidden to have any inter-

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course with the neighbourhood. Bacchic festivals, Black Magic, and the most fantastic forms of debauchery, were reported to be the members' chief interests. They dressed in the habits of monks, drank out of skulls, called themselves Franciscans, and slept in cradles.

One night in the midst of their orgies, a huge ape, hideously attired, was lowered down the chimney by a practical joker, and so scared the members, mostly roaring drunk, that they thought the Devil himself had joined the club founded in his honour. They fled in terror and the club never recovered.

Its foremost figure and founder was Sir Francis Dashwood of Wycombe Park, an over-rich, eccentric profligate who gathered around him boon companions, of whom were Paul Whitehead, a minor poet ; Charles Churchill, ex-parson, rake, and satirist, who observed of his fellow-member—

*May I (can worse disgrace on Manhood fall?)
Be born a Whitehead, and baptized a Paul ! ;*

Frederick, Prince of Wales, living then at Park Place, Henley, during the feud with his father ; the Earl of Sandwich, of whom Lord Chesterfield is reported to have written, " The art of robbing vice of its disgust, and throwing around it the mantle of convivial pleasure, belongs in a very peculiar manner to this nobleman " ; the egregious Bubb-Dodington, Lord Melcombe, as disgusting a character as ever rose, through time-serving, from obscurity to mean notoriety, of whom an epitaph was written—

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*A false, suspicious friend was he,
As all the world can tell,
He flattered Walpole at Whitehall
And damned him in Pall Mall.*

The Duke of Queensberry, the Earl of Bute, the demagogue Wilkes, and Henry Vansittart, who sent the club a present of a baboon from Bengal, were also members. Only the eighteenth century, venal, corrupt, could have produced such a set of depraved characters masquerading as wits or gentlemen.

Sir Francis Dashwood actually became Chancellor of the Exchequer, a singular post for one so unbalanced. He achieved unpopularity by a tax on cider. It is to his credit that he opposed the hanging of Admiral Byng, a miscarriage of justice that caused Voltaire to observe that England occasionally executed an Admiral *pour encourager les autres*, and he was not insensible to art. He erected on the high hill that commands the Wycombe valley a church with a golden ball on top, in which ten persons can be seated. The pulpit and reading-desk are mahogany arm-chairs, on what appear to be chests of drawers from which steps pull out. The church was so inconvenient to reach that it proved useless for the village.

Dashwood built for himself and his friends, from funds left by Bubb-Dodington, the extraordinary mausoleum that stands a little way from the church. It is hexagonal in shape, with Tuscan columns, bears an inscription to Bubb-Dodington over the entrance, and has an Ionic temple in the centre, containing the

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ashes of Dashwood's wife. Busts and arms around the walls commemorate his two other wives and daughter.

But the most astonishing relic of all is now missing. When Whitehead died, Dashwood, now Lord le Despenser, called out the Buckinghamshire Militia to give him funeral honours. The ceremony became semi-comic. There was a procession of ten officers and twenty grenadiers with firelocks reversed, a band of two German flutes, two French horns, two bassoons, six fifes, four muffled drums, with two choristers and eleven singing men in white surplices, a clergyman, and Lord le Despenser in the uniform of a colonel. Dr. Arnold had composed a special piece of music, and four men solemnly beat time with scrolls of white paper. Bells tolled and guns were fired every three and a half minutes as the procession went forward, preceded by the bier carrying an urn in which reposed Whitehead's heart, bequeathed to his friend and patron, Lord le Despenser. The mausoleum at the top of the hill reached, the procession marched around the interior court for an hour "performing funeral glees." At last the urn was deposited, the soldiers fired three volleys, and the procession marched off to merry tunes of drums and fifes.

For over sixty years after this astonishing funeral Whitehead's heart was taken out of the urn and exhibited to strangers, until, in 1839, it was stolen! What an amazing spectacle in the village which made, in Benjamin North's chair factory, the first American rocking-chair, that venerable adjunct of the porch in every American house.

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We landed by Medmenham ferry, and stood admiring the lovely bend of the river, the slow-running water, leafy trees, and lush meadows threaded by the towing-path. In the foreground Medmenham Abbey, with Gothic arches and columns entwined with flowers, crowned the level lawns slipping smoothly to the water's brink.

Meanwhile, Tarzan had found a use for the monument to the soap magnate's defeat. He emerged clad in his white vest and the orange-red shorts made by his mother. They seemed to have been dyed in a Venetian sunset—or were they made from one of those sails that stain with crimson and gold the windless turquoise lagoons?

"*Il est ravissant—le petit adorable!*" murmured Miss Whissitt.

"The poltergeist?" I asked, afraid that Tarzan might overhear.

Miss Whissitt had promised to show me the cottage in which a poltergeist had misbehaved. Strange that an unruly household spirit should have chosen this beautiful, quiet old village in which to perform its antics. But Miss Whissitt, not ordinarily superstitious, was quite firm about the mischievous spirit which had smashed pictures, windows, and furniture, and thrown coal down the chimney until the hearth was black and the sitting-room uninhabitable.

As we walked up the road I again caught sight of the ancient farm-house, high on its cliff over *The Dog and Badger*, which commands the Thames valley. Notable for its brick and flint work, it was here, if legend be true, Nell Gwynne and Charles II had halted

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briefly on their journey to Sir John Borlase at Bockmer.

Miss Whissitt showed me the poltergeist cottage.

"I think I know why it was haunted," I said, looking at the charming old place. "That poltergeist was employed by some covetous person to get rid of the occupant."

"I see you don't believe it!" replied Miss Whissitt. "Wait until you've seen my friends—they were often called in and saw the damage done. It was a terrible sight, glasses, dishes, mirrors, all smashed to fragments. *Oui, c'est vrai.* Here we are."

Miss Whissitt's friends, two ladies of whom I had previously heard from Mr. Pinfold, were obviously very level-headed, well-balanced witnesses. They had seen the destructive work of the poltergeist. Coal had come down the chimney, vases, dishes, pictures, and furniture had been maliciously broken, and finally the unhappy tenant had been driven forth by this unruly spirit. Then, as mysteriously as it had come, it vanished.

Tea was served to us on a lawn enclosed by yew hedges wonderfully fashioned by our hostesses, skilled artists in topiary work. Tarzan consumed a scandalous quantity of home-made cake. Miss Whissitt delivered her famous monologue on monocotyledonous plants, and, suddenly discovering it was six o'clock, said she really must go, as she had an ambulance class at Bix Bottom at eight o'clock. It would take an hour for the launch to get back to Henley. And the gnats became very troublesome in the early evenings.

We drove Miss Whissitt back to Filldyke Cottage from the landing-stage. She seemed truly upset when

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she learned that Tarzan was soon leaving for Italy. Could she give him a little present, would we wait a moment ?

She dashed into the cottage, and came out again with a little square box, curiously carved.

“ There, darling ! It’s a Chinese puzzle, and there’s a reward inside when you get it open. *A rivederci, buon’ viaggio !* ” cried Miss Whissitt, waving at her gate as we drove away.

Tarzan looked at the box. A rather infantile present, I saw he thought.

“ Funny old thing ! ” he said, with the cruel candour of youth. “ But nice, isn’t she ? ” he added, charitably.

For three minutes he was engrossed with the puzzle. Then he gave a sharp cry. He had opened the box, and inside there was a ten-shilling note.

“ Now that’s very naughty of Miss Whissitt,” I said. And when Tarzan asked me why, I made no direct answer. But I knew well that Miss Whissitt had no spare ten shillings, and her gift meant one more addition to her many economies.

III

Three weeks of the scrimmage at Salzburg, of too much music, too much rain, and too many people, made me think longingly of Venice, where the sun shone steadily, and the lagoons lay mile on mile under an azure sky. I fought for seats, I fought for food, I fought for letters. Was it worth all this desperate living to hear Toscanini conduct, to see Mozart’s birthplace trampled under a mob of the over-musical and the half-smart ?

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A magnificent new motor-road had been opened over the Alps into Italy. I put the thought resolutely away, but it returned when I had waited three-quarters of an hour for lunch and half an hour for the bill. My mail was incredibly muddled at the Tourist Bureau. One letter filled me with wonder and despair, as I read it in a café surrounded by a ballet of distracted waiters. "Our man descended the well in the scullery," I read, tearing open an envelope. What well? I had no well in my scullery, it was in the garden. Then, missing the flying Ganymede for the third time, I read on—"and found the water badly contaminated. . . ." Fears for my house-keeper infected with diphtheria arose in me. Ganymede eluded me once more. ". . . badly contaminated with frogs, both dead and alive. The well wants badly cleaning out and washing with hot lime."

Hot lime, dead and live frogs in my well! Had the world gone mad? We did not drink well water. Pilgrim Cottage was on the main. Whatever did the letter mean? I read it again. It came from a firm at Reading. Then, the mystery was solved as I glanced at the envelope. It was addressed to a *Mrs.* Roberts. Poor woman, it was her letter and her well! Hastily scribbling a line of apology, and of sympathy for the frog plague, I took back the letter to the over-worked bureau. Another letter had made me resolve to leave. Tarzan and family were dismayed at my omitting Venice this year.

Twenty-four hours later I was motoring over a superb road, the Grossglocknerstrasse, eight thousand feet high, amid glaciers, and the next day I heard the

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familiar lapping of water on the gondola as Tarzan and his sister rowed me down the Grand Canal. That evening, in starlight, I climbed out on to the *altana*, the platform built above the roof of Tarzan's Venetian house, and was shown a moonflower in full blossom, grown in a pot in my honour. I looked across the linked lights of the lagoon and the anchored shipping, while nearer, the immense dome of the Salute church rose like a grey mountain from the murmurous, jewelled city.

Only when Tarzan and sister were safely in bed did I gently produce my snare, fashioned by the help of a sympathetic friend. There was a long debate, and when I descended those stairs, as midnight boomed over St. Mark's Square, we had snared poor Tarzan. No more the blazing Italian sun, the wide lagoons to swim in, the lovely gondola to row. An English public school had secured another recruit. As I threaded the dark, tortuous streets to my lodging I felt like a conspirator. The only consoling thing was the light that had shone in Tarzan's eyes when I had first whispered our conspiracy on a July day at Pilgrim Cottage. Could it be that in his blood stirred ancestral memories of the old school tie?

IV

Four days before school opened Tarzan arrived at the cottage. He straightway seized a hatchet and began to cut down a dozen half-dead laurel trees that had offended my eyes for a twelvemonth. In the midst of this labour a letter came from his future school. In it was a printed list. I stared and then

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called Tarzan. "What are under-pants?" he asked, innocently, having lived in a world that so far had required none.

Was it possible, I thought, that a small boy could want so many things. "Six soft shirts, four flannel shirts, twelve soft collars, six hard collars, six pairs of socks, three pairs of pyjamas, six sheets, six pillow cases, twelve handkerchiefs, three vests, three pairs of under-pants, four pairs of shoes, six hand towels, one dressing-gown, three bath——" I read, aloud.

"Sounds as if we were going to keep a shop," suggested Tarzan.

"We must go to London first thing to-morrow," I said.

It was all over at last. The name-tabs had not arrived. I sat up beyond midnight inking in name and number on ninety-seven articles. I even painted Tarzan's initials on a black-and-white tuck-box. My housekeeper, fluttering and excited, helped to pack. At one o'clock I went up to bed. I looked in on our victim. He was fast asleep, brown head buried deep in the pillow. A crumpled shirt hung over a chair, a pair of sandals lay on the floor, the orange-red shorts, with loosened belt, lay in a colourful heap. The garb of childhood and freedom was discarded for ever. To-morrow dawned the era of striped trousers, black vest and coat, the unknown maelstrom of four hundred boys, the bell to be answered with alacrity, the pitfalls of sacred taboos and proper form. Poor, joyous Tarzan, what, in the name of civilisation, were we grown-ups doing to him? Obviously he neither knew

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nor cared, trustful and adventurous. He was sleeping to-night in profound tranquillity. It was I, who stood there and looked down at him, and then switched out the light, who felt unhappy and troubled as I tiptoed away.

All the next morning Tarzan chopped wood. Miss Whissitt came in, obviously suppressing her excitement, and brought a present of a fountain pen. Before going she suddenly risked kissing Tarzan, expecting a rebuke. She received a hug that left her breathless and flushed.

At lunch I ate very little, a victim of nerves now the hour approached. Tarzan ate a lot, as though it might be his last opportunity. We carried out the trunk and strapped it on the back of the car. On the way to the school I miserably failed to keep the conversation going. He had been marvellous so far, never a moment's brooding, never a hint of home sickness, of apprehension. But he grew very quiet and I felt a tension.

"I think," said Tarzan, half-way there, "I shall go to sleep, if you don't mind. I'm very full."

With a jerk I corrected the swerve of the car. Tarzan lay back and went fast to sleep. I woke him at the prison gate.

One day, two days, three days. I had provided him with writing-paper and a book of stamps. Then on the fifth day, a letter among twenty others. I tore it open first, foolishly apprehensive, and read :

"Sorry I have not written before, am very terribly busy. I am gloriously happy. The fellows here are topping. Lots of love. Will write soon.—TARZAN."

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I popped the smudgy sheet into an envelope and sent it to his mother in Venice. I ate my breakfast with a light heart, a load off my conscience.



MEDMENHAM ABBEY.

A BOY IN THE HOUSE

*Who left the garden gate unlatched,
Who left the hosepipe on the lawn,
Who used my favourite pen, who scratched
My desk, who starts from early morn
The radio screeching, who explores
The kitchen larder, lets the bath
Run over, rushes out of doors,
Half-naked down the garden path,
Indifferent to the bitter weather—
Who sewed my trouser legs together?*

*Whose shoes are these with laces knotted,
Whose shorts are these flung anyhow,
Whose shirt is this with jam stains spotted?
Young villain, I have caught you now!
But just too late since you are sleeping,
Your head pressed deep in the white pillow,
Your brown throat from your jacket peeping,
Your hair like a gold, tumbling billow:
Is this the boy I must accuse
Of putting tin-tacks in my shoes?*

*Whose laughter rings through all the house,
Who always has a new cut bleeding,
Who can be quiet as a mouse
When 'gainst my knee, as I am reading
A fair head leans? Who, with a kiss,
Impulsive, sweet as April rain,
Will some half-risen doubt dismiss
And lead me captive in his train?
Let all my years count up their treasure,
This boy I love outweighs their measure.*

CHAPTER XI

A CASTLE IN HIDING

I

"GENERAL MERVYN-MORPETH and his sister to see you, Mr. Roberts," said my housekeeper, coming into the garden where I was cutting out fungus growing on the edge of the lawn. Of course they would call when my hands were in a frightful mess and I had on my dirtiest clothes ! I put down the trowel, rinsed my hands under the garden tap, and went into the study. I had never known them to call at ten o'clock in the morning. In a moment I saw by their faces that something unusual had happened.

"Excuse my appearance, I'm digging out the——" I began, when the General interrupted me.

"Suppose you've heard about the seed-poisoning business ?" he said, challengingly. The General's questions are always intended to be taken as negative affirmatives. By his question he meant that I had not heard of the seed business.

I knew that the A.M. and P.M. kept fifty budgerigars in an enormous cage at the end of the conservatory, and I inferred from his question that it had something to do with these birds.

"No—have they been poisoned ?" I asked.

"Yes. Then you've heard ?" demanded the P.M.

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“Isn't it awful?” cried the A.M., tugging at her wash-leather glove.

“I hope they're not all dead?” I said, as sympathetically as I could. I felt very sorry about the birds but I could not understand why they should call at this hour to discuss the tragedy of the poisonous bird seed.

“All! Good heavens, no!” ejaculated the General, giving a shake to the rhinoceros-hide walking-stick. “Bad enough, one of them sick at home, the other dangerously ill in hospital!”

Was it possible, I wondered, that a sick bird could go to a hospital? I knew there were dog hospitals, but I did not know sick birds could go anywhere. And why bother me? I had no passionate attachment to their budgerigars. I am not hard-hearted. I confess to shedding tears over a defunct pet-dog, and I was once grieved at the news of the death of a bird with whom I had only the briefest attachment. This was a jackdaw I met at Tredegar Park one week-end, a member of that assorted menagerie, from boxing kangaroos to vultures, with which Lord Tredegar establishes a trustful intimacy. This jackdaw lived on the padded fender in the hall, in a great wicker cage, lantern-shaped, exactly like the one in which Tytyl carried the Blue Bird of happiness. It endeared itself to me by its habit, whenever a servant came round with the drinks, of spreading its wings and exclaiming “Oh-er! Oh-er!” with such plaintive longing that I began to think it was the re-incarnated spirit of a three-bottle man. When, some weeks later, I learned that “Oh-er” had died of bronchitis I was

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grieved. And its memory so stirred me that I sought for myself a similar bird in a similar cage. But that story belongs to another place. In the A.M. and P.M.'s budgerigars I had observed no habit except one, and could feel no real sorrow for them.

"Did you buy the seed yourself?" I asked, wishing to show some kind of interest.

"Did we? Goodness gracious, no!" answered the P.M., and as though I had accused him of administering arsenic.

"We had nothing whatever to do with it!" said the A.M., a little indignantly. "Young Baker bought the seed and made the cigarettes, and the girl smoked them as well. He's out of hospital and she's still in."

I stared at the A.M. in bewilderment.

"I don't understand. I thought your budgerigars had eaten poisonous seeds," I explained.

"Our budgerigars!" exclaimed the A.M., as though they were superior birds that would never be foolish enough to eat poisonous seeds.

"Then you haven't heard! It's a very serious business. We've just come from the hospital," said the General, one of the Governors. "Some months ago young Baker thought he would plant some parrot seed—they've a parrot—in the garden and see what would come up. Some of it did come up, four or five feet, and flowered. That was all right, but the young fool thought the leaves might make tobacco, and chopped 'em up and smoked 'em! His girl also——"

"Just fancy that girl smoking, she's only seventeen," said the A.M. "Her mother, of course——"

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"Both of 'em nearly poisoned to death. It was Indian hemp seed in the parrot food," went on the P.M. firmly. "Gave 'em hallucinations and drowsiness. He thought he was a policeman controlling traffic. Astonishing sight! The girl was dropping all over the place. *Cannibal intoxication.*"

"*Cannabis*, Poultenay. He wasn't dangerous," interrupted the A.M.

"*Cannabis or cannibal*—damned unpleasant for everybody. We shot 'em down to the hospital at once. That was last night. The boy's out, the girl's in—very ill, very ill," said the P.M., stamping slightly.

"It might have been worse. They say that in the East it rivals hashish," explained the A.M. "It makes the natives run amok and induces insanity."

I tried to imagine someone running amok in Pages Bottom, but I found it difficult to look really alarmed. There was something ludicrous about this parrot-seed story, though, doubtless, the girl was very sick and the young fool badly scared.

"Out of work, no money for cigarettes—that's what it was. They must smoke!" growled the P.M. "However, that isn't what we came about."

Goodness gracious, what could they have come about, I wondered, as the P.M. cleared his throat. A subscription?

"The General Election, you know. We wondered—we thought you might take a few voters to the poll," said the P.M. "Very scattered constituency, a lot of the old folks can't walk."

"Oh, yes—certainly," I said, with false eagerness.

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"We thought you would!" cried the A.M. beaming and wringing her wash-leather gloves.

"Thank you. Thank you!" said the P.M. "Of course—er, you're with us?"

"I could not be in any doubt as to what 'us' meant in the P.M.'s case. I assured him. His sister gave a little whinney of amusement.

"Poultenay wasn't too sure—you literary men, you know!" she said facetiously.

"Ha-a. No damn Bolshevik about you, Roberts. Too level-headed!" exclaimed the P.M. rising. "We must go—mustn't delay you. Many thanks. I'll tell the agent. Good fellow, our member. Bit young, perhaps, but willing!"

I saw them out. Parrot seeds and politics had wasted half an hour of this golden morning. I returned to the fungus.

Ten minutes later I was wanted on the telephone. Having attended to it, I returned to the garden and put up a ladder to try to persuade crimson ramblers not to grow southwards to adorn my neighbour's garden. Five minutes later I was wanted on the telephone again. Then back I went up the ladder. Ten minutes later my housekeeper came out again. The telephone. I flung down the secateurs and descended the ladder. One should really have a telephone receiver on every rose standard, and a bell on every apple tree—or no telephone anywhere at all.

But I melted the moment I picked up the receiver. Of course I would go to lunch on Thursday at Yewden Manor.

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II

I think we numbered a dozen at that most hospitable table. With a lady on my right I discussed dogs, sea travel, Italy, and growing oranges in Florida ; with my left partner I went straight to the point that interested me most.

“ You live in a castle with a moat all round. I’d very much like to see it,” I said.

“ You live in a cottage with a hedge all round, and I’d like to see it also,” replied Lady Macclesfield.

So we satisfied each other at once. I offered her my cottage for her castle ; in practice, Lady Macclesfield visited Pilgrim Cottage that afternoon and I visited Shirburn Castle the next afternoon. The exchange was not a fair one, a hedge all round cannot compete with a moat all round.

There is a seclusion about Shirburn Castle that may be intentional or unintentional. From the sightseer’s point of view it is impregnable and invisible. Never was there a castle and a church so tucked away, or a village so easy to miss. Shirburn is about one mile out of Watlington, at the foot of that natural rampart of the Chilterns where runs the Icknield Way, and Shirburn Hill rises to over eight hundred feet, commanding a magnificent vista of the plain towards Oxford. I think ‘ nosey Parkers ’ must have been repulsed by the resident Parkers, for guide-books sniff, and observe that “ in the village are to be seen, by the lucky, a church and a castle.”

My own reception was gracious enough and my curiosity was satisfied, though I think a visit of at least

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a year would be necessary to investigate all that calls for inspection. And if one drained the moat, and stripped the plaster from the castle walls, Heaven knows what might come to light—skeletons of long lost varlets who missed the drawbridge, sunken household treasure, and walls of mellow Tudor brick.

There is a fable that a certain Lord Macclesfield, driving home fiercely one dark night, forgot his drawbridge was up and disappeared with coach and horses into the moat. Even now on a foggy night, if the butler were forgetful and the departing guest too well dined, a ducking might ensue. For the moat still holds water and the drawbridge is still in use. One can see the grooves in the masonry that once received the portcullis.

When the family do not wish to receive visitors there is no need for that domestic lying to which our servants have been trained, solemn-faced. The butler need not even say, "Miss Otis is not at home, moddom." At the sound of invasion the drawbridge can go up and not even a card can be left. As for travellers with samples—if I lived in a house with a moat I should feel tempted to have a drawbridge on the tip system.

No one could say that Shirburn Castle is beautiful, but it stands in a splendid park and looks across level fields of fine woods. It is oblong in shape, with a battlemented exterior and four round towers at each angle, rising straight from the water of the moat. Originally there was an interior courtyard into which one drove across the drawbridge, through an inner gate. This has now been built in, so that the castle has no interior view. One enters by great oaken doors.

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When these were stripped of their white paint, in 1854, bullet marks were revealed, and the old portcullis proved beyond repair, and crumbled into pieces. Immediately on the left one steps into the baronial hall, a long apartment parallel with the drawing-room which looks north over the moat. The hall is hung with armour, pikestaffs, muskets, and old regimental colours in true baronial style. In the drawing-room there is an excellent Holbein portrait of Erasmus, a Vandyck of Archbishop Laud, and two Hogarth portraits, of the second Earl and his tutor, William Jones.

But it is the library overhead, reached by a delightfully carved bridge-staircase, that attracts attention. It contains some fourteen thousand books, including the scientific collection left by William Jones, among it some of Newton's letters, and an original specimen of the famous *Principia* setting forth his discovery of the laws of gravitation. There are also unique Welsh manuscripts, and, among the rare Caxtons, one most quaintly entitled "*Mirroure of the World*, translated by me, simple person William Caxton, out of French into English, and printed in Westminster Abbey in 1481."

III

The history of this Shirburn Castle goes back to Norman days, and the D'Oily family which, as D'Oyleys, we met, some six centuries later, at Hambleton. Robert D'Oily was a companion in arms of William the Conqueror, and as a reward William married off his friend to a Saxon, one Alghitha, daughter of Wigod, Thane of Wallingford, who may have

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parted with his daughter to save his possessions, or have gracefully retired, or have been killed. Whatever the nature of the proceedings, D'Oily became Lord of Wallingford Castle, and in time his daughter, Maud, brought to her husband, Brian Fitzcount, the new stronghold at Shirburn which her father had built.

Brian was Maud's second venture in matrimony, and by him she had two sons, both lepers, who were confined in a priory. This domestic tragedy apparently caused Brian to take the Cross, and journey to Jerusalem. He died in the Holy Land, and his wife retired to a Normandy abbey. But before Brian Fitzcount left England he was involved in the feud that raged between the Empress Maud and her cousin King Stephen. One of the Empress's most zealous servants during this campaign was Geoffrey de Mandeville, whose father founded the priory at Hurley. Shirburn was held for Stephen, but it surrendered to the Empress in 1141, the year in which she captured Stephen himself. Brian Fitzcount appears, from a record of this year, to have made a clever transfer of allegiance, from Stephen to the Empress. "Brien Fitzcount, Lord of Wallingford, received under his custody William Martel, Sewer (butler) to King Stephen, taken at Winchester, and put him into his closet-prison, called Cloere Brien (Brien's Lockup), and for his ransom had the castle of Shirburn delivered to the Empress." And, one concludes, through the Empress to himself.

When at last Maud's arrogance alienated her supporters and she retired to Normandy, Stephen, again

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in power, saw the folly of allowing the private strongholds which had grown up in his reign, all crenellated and moated, and sought to destroy them. He twice besieged Brian Fitzcount in Wallingford Castle, unsuccessfully, and Shirburn also held out.

There were over one thousand castles built in Stephen's reign. The miseries through which the people passed during the civil war are indescribable. The barons and nobles oppressed them and made prisoners of them, and the instruments of torture that were part of the customary furniture of castles like Shirburn and Wallingford were fiendishly ingenious.

In 1231 the castle passed into the hands of Henry le Tyeis, by the grant of Henry III's brother, Earl of Cornwall, and, in 1307, another Henry le Tyeis held it under the grant of Piers Gaveston, who had become the new Earl of Cornwall as the favourite of Edward II, "by service of rendering yearly one Bow de Auburn, and three arrows without feathers, or tweldepence in lieu of all service." Three years later Tyeis had joined the party of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster. They laid siege to Scarborough, and Gaveston, the hated favourite, surrendered on promise of a fair trial. But the Earl of Warwick came upon his keepers at Wallingford Castle, placed the wretched Gaveston upon a mule, took him to Blacklow Hill, near Warwick, and there beheaded him.

One favourite only gave place to another, to two in fact, the Despensers, father and son. Their arrogance soon drew upon them the hatred of the barons, who, in 1321, conferred together at Shirburn Castle and made plans to end their power. But Edward and

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the Despensers struck first. They captured the Earl of Lancaster and beheaded him, thus avenging Gaveston. With Lancaster's party Henry le Tyeis was captured and hanged in London, along with thirty other knights. His young brother-in-law, Waryne de l'Isle, who was the Governor of Windsor Castle, and was also in the insurrection, suffered the same fate at York.

Within a few years the whirligig of Time brought back the de l'Isles to favour. Isabella of France was brought over, the barons rebelled, Edward II was deposed, and later barbarously murdered, and the two Despensers were executed. Waryne de l'Isle's son, Gerard, who fought in Scotland and in France, inherited the old family castle on the accession of Edward III, in 1327. It was his son, Waryne, who rebuilt the castle and created the edifice we now know. He obtained from Edward III a licence to make a castle of his house at Shirburn—"He may fortify and embattle his mansion at Shirburn, with a wall of stone and mortar." This Waryne de l'Isle's sister was married to Edmund de Stonor, and in writing to him in 1378, after saluting "my treasured sister, your company, and your children, for whom I pray a good and long life," he signs himself "Seignur Teeys," that is, Seigneur de Tyeis, the title inherited from his Norman Tyeis ancestors.

Shirburn Castle passed in descent to the Quatremaynes, who lived there during the stormy period of the Wars of the Roses, in which the castle must have played a part. Sir Richard Quatremayne died in 1460, and his young brother, a merchant in London,

succeeded to the estate. He had a clerk named Thomas Fowler, to whose son he stood godfather, and to whom he left Shirburn Castle and a great part of his estate ; this heir was known later as Sir Richard Quatremayne Fowler, who proved a spendthrift. Shirburn then passed, by marriage, to Leonard Chamberlain, who was a Member of Parliament for Oxford in 1554, and who was granted the priory of Ladye Place by Queen Elizabeth in 1559. The Chamberlains were stout Catholics, and in the family they could claim a Bishop of Ypres. They had great property in France as well as in England, and in 1626, five years before the bishop died, he came to England to resign his succession to Shirburn and elsewhere, which belonged to his family, who were also Barons of Tanquerville in Normandy. " This he did for religion's sake and to avoid the encumbrances of earthly things," says a record.

We have a glimpse of another Chamberlain, in the time of the Civil War. This was Sir Thomas, the High Sheriff, who was commanded to collect money for the Royalist cause. Since Sir Thomas Chamberlain acted as the local collector for Charles I, the castle seems to have been something of a treasury as well as a stronghold of the King's cause. Sir Thomas appears to have died, and his widow lost heart. " Good news from Oxford," runs a contemporary record, dated June 13th, 1646, soon after the King's escape in disguise from Oxford.

" General Fairfax, upon a second petition from Mistress Chamberlain of Shirburn, hath accepted of its surrender. The general, upon her first petition, advised her to address herself to Parliament, which it

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seems she did ; but by reason of other great affairs obtained no speedy answer.

“ Although the house hath been a garrison, yet neither at the first coming of Parliament’s forces to Oxford this time twelvemonth, nor subsequently have they annoyed their forces, but on the contrary have contributed in provisions to the maintenance of those troops employed about Wallingford, as other parts have done. The house being kept with some men-at-arms in it by Master Chamberlain prevented the making of the same an active garrison for the King, which would have annoyed Henley and those parts, and they have only stood upon their guard to defend themselves being plundered, and never took any of the Parliaments soldiers prisoners, nor offered violence to them, nor raised contributions from the county.”

In short, Mistress Chamberlain does not appear to have been a very zealous Royalist, or perhaps she had a shrewd idea of the end of the business.

Shirburn Castle was bought in 1716 from Sir Thomas’s nephew by Thomas Parker, first Earl of Macclesfield, a remarkable father of a remarkable son, and founder of the family still living at Shirburn. Parker was a lawyer who soon achieved a reputation at the Bar as a ‘silver-tongued counsel.’ He was a Whig, knighted by Queen Anne in 1705, when Marlborough was fighting in the Spanish Netherlands. Parker played a prominent part in the impeachment of Dr. Sacheverell, a windy divine who was thus kicked into history by a foolish prosecution. He was suspended from his clerical function, and his sermons were burnt by the common hangman, a form of publicity

that is lost to us. Parker next became Lord Chief Justice, through the influence of the Duke of Somerset, a great Whig. In 1711 he declined the Lord Chancellorship, making himself notable for being "the first lawyer who ever refused an absolute offer of the Seals from a conscientious difference of opinion," from which one gathers that he would have no truck with the Tories, who, following the dismissal of the termagant Duchess of Marlborough by Queen Anne, had at last come into power. He backed the right horse, the party that was for the succession of George of Hanover instead of a Jacobite restoration, and when the Queen suddenly died, and George the First came to the throne, Sir George Parker reaped the favours shown to those who had worked for the Hanoverian succession.

Seated on a throne that he felt might collapse under him at any moment, ruling a country whose language he could not speak, a dull clod who had imprisoned his wife, lived openly with two mistresses whom he made duchesses, and was at bitter enmity with his son, King George had only one thought, to collect as much English money as he could in case he was sent home. He clung to the Whig party, which was now to enjoy fifty-six years of office. The Whig peers by the use of their 'pocket boroughs,' packed the House of Commons by a judicious mixture of corruption and coercion.

Thomas Parker was made a peer in 1716, the year after the Pretender's melancholy face and ungenial manner had served to depress his followers. The new peer, taking the title of Baron Macclesfield, and with it a pension of one thousand two hundred pounds a year for life, established himself strongly in the favour of



Thomas Phelps 1782

He was born at
the town of
and was educated
at the college of
He was a member of
the Royal Society of
London and the
American Academy of
Arts and Sciences.

John Bartlett

He was born at
the town of
and was educated
at the college of
He was a member of
the Royal Society of
London and the
American Academy of
Arts and Sciences.

The Shirburn Astronomers

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King George. The first Baron Macclesfield now bought himself Shirburn Castle, and began to make alterations and additions. His sovereign's golden opinion was increased when Lord Macclesfield pronounced a judgment, in which his fellow-judges concurred, that the King had the sole control over the education and marriages of his grandchildren, a ruling that turned the Prince of Wales into Macclesfield's implacable enemy.

But he was still soaring. In 1718 he became Lord Chancellor and received from the King a present of fourteen thousand pounds. No wonder building operations went on at Shirburn. One can imagine Mr. Stonor at Stonor House, as he rode over his estate, watching the constant 'doing up' of the castle, and observing—"Egad, that fellow's feathering his nest. Politics and law, that's the game to play!"

It was, and Macclesfield was not only receiving liberal presents for himself, he was feathering his son's nest. That same year his son George received a pension of one thousand two hundred pounds, the only reason for this being that the young man was waiting for a Tellership of the Exchequer, a profitable sinecure, which came to him a year later!

This good fortune, visited on other dull sons of distinguished sires, all Lord Chancellors, moved Pope to write derisively in *The Dunciad* :

. . . great Cowper, Harcourt, Parker, King,
Why all your toils? Your sons have learned to sing
How quick ambition hastes to ridicule—
The Sire is made a Peer, the son a fool.

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The baron became an earl in 1721, with a viscounty for lucky young George, who was now twenty-four years of age, and travelling in Italy. At this stage he appears to have given his father some anxiety by his 'goings on.' He had found his way to Venice and become entangled with a lady, on whom he spent large sums of money. The father, greatly alarmed, took steps to separate them. Later it was common gossip that George had contracted a marriage with a French woman in the course of his travels, and that she came after him, and the business was hushed up in 1723. Whatever the case, in regard to the Venetian lady, the earl's letters to his son contain no suggestion of any marriage having taken place. Despite these wild oats, George was destined to become a serious and learned person in later life.

By now the house of Parker seemed well established, as sturdy and invulnerable as the moated castle it had acquired. Alas for the mutability of human plans! There was a resounding crash, a fall the more overwhelming because of the spectacular rise that had preceded it. In November, 1724, following 'nasty rumours, the Privy Council caused an enquiry to be made into the funds of wards in Chancery. The report revealed not only considerable defalcations on the part of some of the Masters, but also a case of grave suspicion against the Lord Chancellor himself.

Macclesfield resigned the Seals, but continued to be received at Court by King George. The storm broke. There was a cry of rage from one end of the land to the other. England had only just emerged from the tremendous scandal of the South Sea Company, whose

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bankruptcy brought down the Stanhope Cabinet. The Postmaster-General had committed suicide, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was expelled from the House for "notorious and infamous corruption," the Prime Minister, while being attacked in debates, fell down dead in an apoplectic fit. Walpole, who succeeded him, was no better. Gross, ignorant, coarse in language, he was charged with having cynically remarked that every man had his price, a statement regrettably true in his era. Open bribery and corruption were rampant.

Macclesfield was caught, others were not. Large sums belonging to the Duchess of Montrose, a lunatic, whose estate was in Chancery, were unaccounted for, among many others. Macclesfield was impeached by a majority vote of one hundred and seven in the House of Commons, and was called to the bar of the House of Lords. His trial lasted thirteen days. The twenty-one articles of impeachment included selling Masterships in Chancery, receiving bribes, concealing the frauds of absconding Masters, and making use of the money of wards for his own private use. He was found guilty by the unanimous vote of ninety-three peers present, sentenced to a fine of thirty thousand pounds, and to imprisonment in the Tower until it was paid.

George I stood by him, although he struck him off the roll of Privy Councillors. He declared he would pay the fine himself, and actually paid one instalment of one thousand pounds, when his death stopped further payments.

The deficiency in the Chancery accounts was eighty-two thousand pounds. Macclesfield remained in cus-

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tody for six weeks while the fine was procured. When he was released he disappeared from public life, died seven years later, and was buried at Shirburn.

He was defined by a contemporary as 'a good though not honest lawyer,' a distinction that was not then considered very necessary. He was, however, a man of wide interests, with a keen interest in science. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, a mathematician of repute, and his friendship with Sir Isaac Newton, a visitor to Shirburn Castle along with other distinguished scientists, resulted in his being one of the pall-bearers at Newton's funeral in Westminster Abbey. But his manners were bad, and, together with his favouritism, particularly to handsome young Yorke, later Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, provoked a revolt at the Bar. There was a saying, in allusion to his birthplace, that "Stafford had produced three of the greatest rogues that ever existed : Jack Sheppard, Jonathan Wild, and Lord Macclesfield." Since the first two were hanged at Tyburn within a year of each other, the inference was that the ex-Lord Chancellor, sentenced at the same time, should meet a similar fate.

But there were those who sang his praises, and alluded to him as a Mæcenas. In his household there was a Mr. William Jones, with whom he studied mathematics, and who acted as tutor to his son and young Yorke. Jones was a famous mathematician and became a regular member of the family. Owing to the failure of a banker he had the misfortune to lose the greater part of his property. But this was in the good old days of sinecures, and the second earl, who was then Teller of the Exchequer, a fat sinecure, pro-

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cured for Jones the position of second clerk in his office, another sinecure. Jones was already enjoying one sinecure, obtained for him by his patron Yorke, now Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. As though this were not enough, Macclesfield offered to procure him yet another office, but this time Jones declined, replying quaintly that 'it would have imposed upon him the trouble of more official attendance than was compatible with his temper, or his attachment to scientific pursuits.'

It was while living with the family at the Castle that Jones met his future wife, the daughter of George Nix, chief rival of the cabinet-maker, Chippendale. Of their marriage came the remarkable Sir William Jones, a prodigy of Oriental learning who spoke thirteen languages thoroughly, and knew twenty-eight others.

George Parker, the second earl, who had adventured abroad, received the Tellership, and represented Wallingford for five years in Parliament, developed a passion for astronomy. Aided by James Bradley, he erected an astronomical observatory at Shirburn, with the finest equipment then existing. His series of observations began in 1740 and lasted until his death, twenty-four years later. He trained in his service Thomas Phelps, who had been a stable boy to his father, and promoted him to be chief observer in the Shirburn observatory. Another boy, originally a shepherd named Bartlett, was similarly trained and made Assistant Observer.

There is a delightful print, dated 1776, showing Phelps and Bartlett at work, the former in his eighty-third year. It was he who, first in England, detected

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the great six-tailed comet of 1743, and when the ex-stable-boy-astronomer died, aged eighty-four, Lord Macclesfield put up a memorial in Shirburn Church to the remarkable old man "who without the aids of education, acquired by his own industry a competent skill in Mathematical as well as other Branches of Knowledge."

We have several glimpses of the second Earl of Macclesfield at work. He was anxious to procure for his friend Bradley the Royal Astronomership which had fallen vacant through the death of Halley, who derives immortality from the comet he discovered. Macclesfield was a good friend. He wrote urgently to Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. "It is not only my friendship for Mr. Bradley ; it is my real concern for the honour of the nation," he said, and added, tactfully, that Hardwicke was "the patron of learning and learned men in general ; it was upon this foot that my father, when in the post which you now enjoy, took upon him to recommend Dr. Halley to the Royal professorship at Greenwich." In conclusion he adds a delightful paragraph. "But, my lord, we live in an age when most men, how little soever their merit be, seem to think themselves fit for whatever they can get, and often meet with some people who, by their recommendations of them, appear to entertain the same opinion of them." That was a masterly dismissal of rival candidates and their recommenders. He succeeded in his advocacy.

The earl appears to have been of kindly disposition, and could turn from watching the heavens to the trials of poor folk. Thus, on the Thursday night of October

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28th, 1742, he wrote to Jones from Shirburn, after a local fire, "by which numbers of poor people were ruined, and amongst the poor sufferers, one who kept a public-house which was entirely consumed," asking that the excise duty on a great quantity of the liquor consumed might be refunded to the victim, and enlisting his services as "your very affectionate and faithful friend."

At Shirburn he not only erected an observatory, but also a large chemical laboratory fitted with furnaces and much apparatus.

"I haven't seen the observatory yet—can I see it?" I asked Lord Macclesfield, as we walked in front of the moat, after a tour of the house.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"It's incredible, but there's not a trace of it anywhere," he replied.

"But the place—was it on the roof or in the grounds?"

"I don't even know that—somebody made a clean sweep. There's not a sign of his instruments anywhere. He might never have existed."

But millions, unaware that he ever existed, have had their birthdays, and all the events of their lives changed, in the matter of date, largely because of him. He was the inspirer and chief agent in the movement for the reform of the calendar in 1752. Up till that year the Julian Calendar, invented eighteen centuries before by Julius Cæsar, had been in use in England. The great Roman, by a slight miscalculation, made the year too short, and the deficit through the centuries had amounted to eleven days in 1752.

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Macclesfield urged the adoption of the Gregorian Calendar ; other nations had already adopted it, and his speech in the House of Lords, together with a paper read to the Royal Society, of which he was President, exerted a powerful influence in the face of a storm of ignorant prejudice. The great Lord Chesterfield, in *Letters to His Son*, spoke of him as “one of the greatest mathematicians and astronomers in Europe,” and added, in tribute to his speech in the House, “He spoke with infinite knowledge and all the clearness that so intricate a matter could admit of ; but as his words, his periods and his utterance were not near so good as mine the preference was more unanimously, though unjustly, given to me.”

The Gregorian Calendar was adopted. Thus, the change being made on September 2nd, 1752, the day that followed became not the third but the fourteenth. This so bewildered the multitude that the Government was attacked for having defrauded the people of eleven days of their existence. So unpopular was Lord Macclesfield's achievement that when, two years later, his son stood for Parliament, the mob cried “Give us back the eleven days we've been robbed of !”

It was this Lord Macclesfield who presented the petition of “the Noblemen and Gentlemen in the Neighbourhood of Henley-on-Thames” when Mary Blandy, in 1751, poisoned her father with a ‘love-philtre’ supplied by her lover, Captain Cranstoun. That gentleman having vanished, the petition craved that a reward might be offered for “the Wicked Contriver.” The petition was presented by him as High Steward of Henley, an office subsequently held

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by the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth earls, all of whom lived to well over eighty.

The interior and exterior of Shirburn Castle, with its long dignified libraries, its high, strong walls, its views of wooded park and meadow and its reflective untroubled moat suggest the utmost tranquillity. Forever gone the sound of Norman strife, the feuds of barons, the bruit of civil war.

Yet once, late in the eighteenth century, the waters of the moat were troubled, an occurrence so strange that the earl's son, standing on the lawn, could scarcely believe his eyes. It was ten o'clock in the morning of November 1st, 1775. The gardener, approaching him, suddenly stopped short and looked earnestly at the water of the moat, whereupon he went up to the man to see what held him so. To his amazement there was a strange commotion of the water, a series of waves, increasing gently in volume and speed, that finally broke against the bank with great impetuosity. The movement died "with such quickness that it left a considerable water entangled among the pebbles laid to defend the bank."

This strange phenomenon was observed in many parts of England. Some days later the cause was discovered. At that very hour Lisbon had been laid in ruins by a great earthquake entailing a loss of twenty thousand lives.

IV

"And is there no ghost?" I said, asking the stock question in the ancestral castle. We sat at tea in Lady

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Macclesfield's cosy den, curtains drawn against the dusk.

"Sorry—no ghost at all," she replied.

"It's such a suitable home for a ghost—you might advertise for one," I suggested.

"Moat, drawbridge, chains, and suitable lodgings!" she laughed.

"You'd have heaps of applicants—there are so many excellent spots for moaning, and just think what a splash one could make!" I added, and then suddenly stopped, for a pale young footman appeared at my elbow with muffins. Our conversation might give him nerves and he would "just have to go, milady."

But lacking a ghost, Shirburn Castle has a legend more intriguing than any tradition of an armour-rattling knight or a loose-headed lady. In the *The Divine Comedy*, Dante starts his great poem with the lines :

*In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood, astray,
Gone from the path direct ; and e'en to tell,
It were no easy task, how savage wild
That forest, how robust and rough its growth.*

It is possible that the particular wood in mind was not somewhere in Tuscany, but was the Chiltern woods near Shirburn Castle. Preposterous? Let us see.

There lived in the thirteenth century an Italian philosopher and poet, Brunetto Latini by name. He

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was a member of the Guelph party in Florence and, owing to its defeat in 1260, he took refuge in France for eight years. After that he returned to Florence and played a prominent part as a scholar and politician in the life of the city. While in France he wrote a poem, *Tesoretto*, in allegorical form.

Dante fell under Latini's influence, and regarded him as tutor and friend. There was a dark passage in Latini's career, and for his abnormality Dante does not hesitate to put him in Hell in *The Divine Comedy*, although he greets him with the greatest affection and gratitude when he encounters him there.

There is a well-established legend that during his exile Brunetto Latini visited Oxford. He halted at Shirburn, having been a whole day coming from London, and he was in sad fear of robbers when passing through the Chiltern forests.

In the time of Queen Elizabeth, the Vicar of Hurley served the church at Maidenhead and he received a special allowance as amends for passing through the thicket, a place infested with robbers. Even as late as the eighteenth century the Chilterns were notorious.

To-day when a member of the House of Commons wishes to resign he applies for the Chiltern Hundreds. It was a principle that no member could resign, derived from days when the gentry were compelled to serve in parliament. Since he could not hold an office of profit, by accepting a stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds he, *ipso facto*, ceased to be a member. This stewardship has now become a sinecure, but in early times it was an arduous

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office, the steward being responsible for the suppression of the robbers with which the Chilterns were infested.

Brunetto Latini recorded his unpleasant journey across the Chilterns, in a letter (Symonds, *M. S. S.*)—

“ Our journey from London to Oxford was with some difficulty and danger made in two days ; for the roads are bad and we had to climb hills of hazardous ascent, and which to descend are equally perilous. We passed through many woods considered here as dangerous places, as they are infested with robbers ; which indeed is the case with most of the roads in England. This is a circumstance connived at by the neighbouring Barons, from the consideration of sharing in the booty, these robbers serving as their protectors on all occasions, personally, and with the whole strength of their band.

“ However, as our company was numerous, we had nothing to fear. Accordingly we arrived the first night at Shirburn Castle, in the neighbourhood of Watlington, under the chain of hills over which we passed at Stokenchurch. This castle was built by the Earl of Tanquerville, one of the followers of the fortunes of William the Bastard, Duke of Normandy, who invaded England, and slew Harold in a battle which decided the fate of the kingdom. It is now in possession of one of the said Earls.

“ As the English barons are frequently embroiled in dispute and quarrels with the Sovereign, and with each other, they take the precaution of building strong castles for their residence, with high towers and deep

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moats surrounding them, and strengthened with Drawbridges, Posterns and Portcullises. And further, to enable them to hold out for a considerable time in case they should happen to be beseiged, they make a provision of victuals, arms, and whatever else is necessary for the purpose."

Obviously Latini's journey made a lasting impression on him. Is it not possible that he was drawing upon his personal experience when he wrote his allegorical poem *Tesoretto*? In it he describes how he is returning from an Embassy to the King of Spain, on which he has been sent from Florence. On the plain of Roncevalles he meets a scholar on a mule, who gives him bad news from Florence. Struck with grief at this news, Latini, musing with his head bent downwards, loses his road and wanders into a terrifying wood—*mi ritrovai per una selva oscura*. "I found myself in a dark wood," to borrow Dante's own words. Then, after severe trials, Latini enters the region of Pleasure, encounters Ovid, escapes, returns to a forest of visions and, ascending a mountain, meets Ptolemy, a venerable old man.

Here lies the germ of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. He, too, begins with a terrifying experience in a wild wood. "It has been observed," writes Cary, the great translator, "that Dante derived the idea of the opening of his poem, by describing himself as lost in a wood, from the *Tesoretto* of his master."

If one assumes, as I think one may, that Brunetto Latini had the Chiltern woods in mind when writing his *Tesoretto*, then it is not unreasonable to infer that

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Dante, borrowing the idea, was describing an event in the Chiltern woods near Shirburn, and the first lines of *The Divine Comedy* unconsciously set the opening scene in England !



SHIRBURN CASTLE.

THE HOUSE ON A HILL

*A little house on a windy hill
And, beyond, a starry sky,
Sleeping fields in the moonlight chill,
And the keen wind raging high ;
But secure within, a home of peace,
Warm and locked from the night,
Music and generous talk and ease
In the soft, dim candle-light.*

*Fleeting hours not touched with fame,
Nor the splendour of dreams come true,
And yet what a little thing will shame
The triumphs the world can view.
Outside, the wind rose high and shrill,
Within, secure and warm,
In a little haven high on a hill
What cared we for the storm ?*

*For a golden voice with the 'cello rose,
Two hands touched ivory keys,
We sang old songs of ancient woes,
Time-honoured melodies ;
And the lonely wind like a lost soul went
Wailing along the night,
Heard in the pause when the music, spent,
Died in a faint delight.*

*Ah, the laurels and triumphs of long, long years
Shall fade, but the little things
Will all come back with a grace of tears
On soft, inaudible wings,
And the wind shall wail o'er a phantom hill,
The music come to an end,
And one will mourn the voice grown still,
The eyes of a faithful friend.*

CHAPTER XII

MAN PROPOSES . . .

I

THE end of September brought the apple harvest, and with it a real problem for a tiny cottage. Where should we put them all? Upstairs on the landing they stood in apple-pie order, at the command of Colonel Crust. I had weighed down the Noisy Nuisance with a load of rosy-cheeked Cox's pippins. Woe! if his 'in-nards' required attention. In desperation I put apples under the spare bed, but my housekeeper protested. She gallantly offered to take them into the 'doomed' battalion, a collection of cripples who are transformed into Pilgrim Cottage chutney. Poor Ethel, her proud production of twenty jars is soon reduced to five, such is the demand for her apple chutney. For those who suffer from too many apples in the orchard, and too little space in the storeroom, here is her delicious solution:

Put into a muslin bag $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. brown sugar, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. root ginger, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. salt, 1 oz. chillies; boil together in 3 pints of vinegar for 3 minutes. Take out muslin bag. Add to vinegar 4 lb. peeled apples, cored and sliced, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. sultanas, 2 large onions cut into small pieces. Boil till cooked, then bottle.

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Ethel has an alternative, and the result delights me as much for its colour as for its taste. It is apple and elderberry jelly. Elderberries abound in most country lanes, so it is a purely home product, of the utmost simplicity in the making.

Wash apples, do not peel. Put in preserving pan with equal quantities of elderberries. Boil until soft, then strain, and to every pint of juice add one pound of good sugar. Boil quickly until jelly sets on cold saucer.

Very simple, but a sure compliment-bringer to the tea table.

Tarzan was amazingly agile in apple gathering, but a few at the top of the trees defied him, and I had to forbid further perilous onslaughts. They turned red cheeks to him as he was carried off on his last day of freedom. I never regret those ungathered apples. They are a thanksgiving offering to the birds kind enough to stay over for the winter.

A sharp frost one October morning and a dead bullfinch on the garden path warned me that the cold siege was beginning. I examined the stock of logs, rolled up the hose-pipe, took down the garden seat, cut the dying plants, and lifted the gladioluses. Sacrificial fires rose all down the valley. My poplars let fall a tribute of gold, and one morning, suddenly, the chestnut tree shed her dress and stood shamelessly naked. Everything dripped, one's breath was visible a foot ahead. Indoors the lights were on at four

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o'clock and the smell of toast and burning wood greeted us on coming in from a day's labour in the garden.

Lovely autumn, with its red sunsets, the last call from a blackbird on the barren bough, the frost creeping from the corner of the window-pane, the flicker of fire-light on black beams, the glowing hearth in a silence filled with the tick of the clock. Then the sudden flood of light on cheerful chintzes, the low tea table bright with silver and lace, the restful lounge, the cheerful coloured rows of books, the strange birds and animals thronging the gay garden of my Persian carpet, and the bookshelf-fireplace made that first winter in the cottage. Let winter come, though spring be far behind. And why, in the New Year, have I committed myself to go forth to far Florida, warm though it be ?

For the tenth time I re-arrange my books, but not an inch of new space can I find. I really must build, but where ? Whenever I suggested an addition to the cottage there was a loud protest. I should spoil its odd, delightful shape, ruin its character. Then one morning, contemplating the wooden sunbathing platform that Louis and I had built, now somewhat weather-beaten, an idea came. Why not a brick platform with a room underneath ? It seemed simple, there were two retaining walls, and the old foundations of a third. There was an unsightly blank space where Tarzan had cleared the dead laurels. Why not build a room with a view, the view an Italian garden, à la Whissitt ? I had in store a pair of old Italian gates. I would have a French window looking south-east, a

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window looking west, and over all a really substantial flat roof for sunbathing.

A few days later Louis, my former secretary, now in business in Paris, arrived for the fourth time this year. He is a disgraceful Frenchman, he loves England with a fervour he does not extend to *la patrie*, and England means my corner of it, with Pilgrim Cottage at the heart. He moved into it with my furniture and knows all its oddities. He helped to build the fireplace, had a bout with the Noisy Nuisance, and laboured with me on the first sun-platform ; in short the place is as much his as mine. All his holidays are spent here. His love of England, however, has not enabled him to conquer the language, and delightful *contretemps* occur, as when he solemnly asked an elderly lady at my table whether she would like some belly water. There was a moment of horrified silence, and then I hastened to explain that Louis was offering barley water. In apology, he confessed he was 'downfounded' at his error.

When he arrived I mentioned the proposed building operations. His face lit up at once. If he had been Miss Whissitt he would have exclaimed, "*C'est magnifique !*" Instead, he said, "We will start in the morning early."

"We must have a plan—we can't do it in the fortnight you are here," I observed.

"Every morning at six we rise, and——"

"Not to build a palace would I rise at six," I replied, firmly, checking this Gallic enthusiasm.

But we agreed to start fairly early. Until midnight we sprawled in front of the fire, drawing plans. As

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usual we quarrelled slightly over cubic calculations. One of us arrived at a need for five thousand bricks. We tried again and needed two thousand two hundred. We tried again, detected an appalling blunder in the matter of cube-root, and arrived at five hundred bricks, which was correct. We decided to buy a French window, to save time. This was the only concession to professionalism. While Louis prepared the foundation I undertook to make a door-frame and two window frames, from the old platform. Early on the morrow we would go to Reading to buy the French window. As for bricks, lime, sand, cement—was there not a brickyard near us that the Romans had patronised?

The French window wasted a morning. Reading had no ready-made French windows. One could be bought, of steel, one could be ordered, and ready in a fortnight. We scorned steel, we declined to wait. Journeys to four of those littered wildernesses called 'builders' yards' proved fruitless. "I will make the French window!" I declared, gallantly.

At the cross roads a traffic signal checked our car. "Look!" said Louis. "Perhaps they have a toucan or a jackdaw. I will see."

There was a birdshop across the pavement. He knew I coveted a jackdaw in a wicker cage. Before I could protest he got out. I followed quickly to stop him. As I knew, they had no jackdaw, but they had a parrot. It looked depressed and malevolent. I was not interested in parrots. Then Louis saw a Java sparrow. Evan Tredegar had called for tea one day with one on his shoulder, they were on the most

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affectionate terms. I refused to be enticed into buying a Java sparrow. They were difficult to tame. A cageful of budgerigars caught our attention. Somehow we came out of that shop with a green budgerigar in a cage, and a bag of bird seed. The traffic signal said "Go." We went.

At the street corner we nearly ran down Henley's oldest and richest resident.

"Hello!" cried the affable old boy, "what are you doing in Reading?"

"We came to buy a French window," I answered.

He blinked a moment, and then saw something in the back of the car.

"Why, you've got a bird in a cage!" he said.

"Yes—we can't get a French window, so we got the bird. Good-bye."

I drove on, leaving him gasping.

"That man—he thinks we are mad?" asked Louis.

"It requires no thinking—we are!" I retorted.

"England is nize to do these things," observed Louis. And what he meant by that remark I did not venture to enquire.

The foundations went down, the walls rose. I carpentered desperately for two days, and then joined in the bricklaying. A moment came when we disputed, of course. Our line of bricks was not meeting on the same level. After a warm three minutes Louis downed tools and went off. I watched his sturdy figure in black corduroy shorts, sweater, and mortar-plastered boots disappear across the lawn. I carried on. All

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this was true to ancient form. Half an hour later he came back.

"What for you do now?" he demanded, after regarding the line of bricks I had brought level.

"What for have you gone away?" I mocked, slamming down mortar on the wall.

"I gather mushrooms."

I ignored the absurd answer and went on. Louis picked up a trowel and went on also. We worked desperately. At breakfast next morning I found he had gathered mushrooms.

We became engrossed over a plumb-line that was out of plumb. We walked away and looked at our corner. It bulged oddly.

"It makes it antique nizely," commented Louis.

Ethel appeared across the lawn.

"Half-past twelve, Mr. Roberts!" she called.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, flicking mortar off my hands. "We must stop at once!"

"Why?" demanded Louis, tapping a brick.

"We're lunching with Charles the First at Harpsden Court, at one-fifteen," I answered, as we fled into the house.

"Charles the First?"

"Alias Colonel Noble. I suppose you've never heard of the Oxford Pageant of 1907? Neither had I, but Dion Clayton Calthrop, who was the pageant-master, has a note on our host."

Indoors I showed Louis the passage from Calthrop's *Memoirs*.

"First, pictorially, comes a vision of a certain Mr. Noble, who took the part of Charles the First. Talk

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about getting into the skin of the part, this pleasant gentleman became Charles ! He had several suits made, copied from portraits of the King, and wore them regularly in the streets ; his servants were in the correct livery, his horse a Van Dyck breed, his manner royal. He was, in fact, Charles to the life, and it was fortunate that we did not produce the scene of the execution, because I fear he might have completely lost his head."

"And we should have lost a delightful host and some very excellent cooking," I added.

II

The old house at which we were due has foundations embedded deep in English history. It was there when King John summoned its owner, in 1204, to send a knight, horse, and armour to Wallingford Castle. Another owner seems to have liked his home so much that he paid a ten-pound fine rather than accompany Henry III overseas. Sir Humphrey Forster, one of twenty-one children, who owned Harpsden later, was a courtier of Queen Elizabeth.

Harpsden was originally an enormous house with two courts of thirty rooms each, and seven halls. Even now it is a labyrinth, with different levels, a jumble of roofs, and a secret room—still secret, for it has been lost ! Some years ago when a 'Cromwell' door was removed from the hall to the front porch, workmen accidentally found a secret passage with a panel in it dated '1573.' Unfortunately they went on with their work over a fireplace and sealed up the passage, which led to an internal room.

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The hiding-place was probably made by Sir George Forster, who had every reason for 'nerves.' In the reign of Henry VIII he saw, unwittingly, three poor men burned at Windsor for clinging to their ancient faith. Knowing the fickleness of kings, he probably prepared this hiding-place for some future occasion. It does not appear to have been in request when Queen Mary visited the house later. The owner, whatever his beliefs, provided his Queen with a small oratory, which may be seen to-day, adjoining the bedroom she used.

In the time of the Civil War General Bartholomew Hall acquired the house. He was a friend of Sir Bulstrode Whitelock, and they had a little sea speculation together, which proved rather costly. General Hall took advantage of his presence on the winning side of the Civil War to molest his neighbour, a Mr. Francis Plowden, and encouraged Essex to attack this gentleman, who was a Royalist and a Catholic. The General played a hand also, and there was a highwayman-touch about the manner in which he waylaid Plowden's coach at Shiplake, turned the poor man and his family out, and despoiled him of five hundred pounds on his person. Poor gentle Mr. Plowden! He had "kindly entertained the bargie-men" at his house, but they reported him to the Parliamentary forces, nevertheless.

The Halls were at Harpsden until 1855, and Henry Hall has left a record of his presence by carving three initials deep on the door of the fine barn by the church, with the date 1689.

How many people passing through Harpsden have

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noticed the singular ornamentation on the barn and cartshed across the road? They look as though Chinese carvers had been at work on the ends of these buildings. Years ago Colonel Noble discovered in a room a collection of hand-carved wooden blocks used more than one hundred years ago for printing wall-papers. With some of these he has most ingeniously boarded the outbuildings. They greatly puzzle the few who notice them.

“We’re late,” I said, as we turned in at the gate, “which means we have kept six people waiting.”

“Six people?” asked Louis.

“I think so. I’ve never seen our host sit down at table with less than six present. It may be——”

A long-drawn sound that escapes from Louis on occasions when stirred to admiration interrupted me. I was not surprised; the high baroque gate, the straight sweep of the drive, bordered with level lawns flanked by flower beds, topiary yews standing to attention like a guard of honour all the way, the old house, creeper-clad, mullioned-windowed, sunning itself at the foot of a green wall of towering elms, make an ensemble of which old England is a peerless composer.

We swept round the circular, sundial-centred fore-lawn, drew up, and after pressing the fuse-cap of an Yser shell that makes the door-bell, entered the long hall. I glanced at the guests gathered by the great fireplace. “Six!” I whispered, as the butler relieved us of our coats. With an apology, the two bricklayers went forward to their waiting host.

At three-thirty we tore ourselves away from this

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warm, hospitable old house. But not before Louis had seen the Peter Pan hut in an enchanted wood of apple-trees overgrown with climbing roses, the garden of rest, dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi and the birds, with the red-tiled church over the wall, and, upstairs, in the drawing-room, the *chef-d'œuvre* of the remarkable Mr. Humphrey Gainsborough, a plaster ceiling with a rotunda decorated with a delicacy that made me believe it was an example of fine Italian craftsmanship. Of all the astonishing works of the Reverend Humphrey Gainsborough, a Congregational minister in Henley from 1748 to 1776, this is perhaps the most remarkable. But what could he not do beside save souls ?

He came of a remarkable family. One brother was Thomas, the great artist, another was 'Scheming Jack,' who made himself a pair of wings and flew safely down from a building, but not up. Jack invented a self-rocking cradle and a cuckoo to sing all the year round. He died on a sea voyage undertaken to test an invention for determining longitude.

Humphrey was no less ingenious. When you go down the very steep hill that tumbles you across the bridge into Henley, you descend less precipitately because of Humphrey, who cut the top off the hill and deposited it at the bottom by means of an escalator system of chained trucks, then a novel idea. He built the bridge, out of stones from Reading Abbey, that spans the valley in the Henley-Wargrave Road. He made a sundial capable of pointing the hours to a second, he invented a fire-proof box, he designed a public weighing-machine for the town, and received a prize of fifty pounds for the invention of a tide mill.

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It is claimed for him that he invented the steam-engine ; “ unluckily for him he showed it to a friend of Watt, then visiting Henley.” He certainly had much to do with designing the locks on the Thames near Henley, and he was the official collector of the lock fees. He died, fittingly enough, in a Henley riverside meadow, with these tolls in his pocket. Of all the works of this grave and much-loved minister, the hill he engineered and the plaster ceiling carved at Harpsden Court are his best memorials. He must, in his day, have been one of the sights of the little town. “ There goes Mr. Gainsborough, Sally—I wonder whatever he’s a-doing now ! ” one can hear the cook saying at *The Catherine Wheel* as he passed the window.

At three forty-five, in a rapidly dying light, the bricklayers were at work again. The walls rose higher and higher, more and more mortar fell on us. On the fifth day of our labour we had to consider the sun-bathing platform and how to seal it. Louis was sad, he had hoped to assist me in the final act, but it was not to be. To satisfy him we placed the joists across, to see what it was like. This was in the dusk of his final day. Early on the morrow he departed for France and two weeks’ military service. Gathering our tools together in the growing darkness, I promised to await his return in three weeks, when we could complete our edifice.

III

Three weeks of a wet October had gone. I worked incessantly on this book ; the garden and the garden-

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house knew me not. When Louis came back I would lay down the pen for the trowel. My few excursions included one to old Mr. and Mrs. Harman up at The Smithy. To my dismay I found Mrs. Harman in bed, her apple-red cheeks just emerging from the sheets, her blue eyes bright as ever.

"You know, they get very excited," she said. "A lot of old folks have been dying off round here, and I suppose they think it's my turn. Last night my husband left the light on downstairs. Someone passing in the early morning saw it, and was startled. The neighbours were roused. They peered in—I suppose they thought I was lying on the floor. I wasn't, I was warm in bed," added Mrs. Harman, with a chuckle. "The doctor's keeping me here for a day or two."

Strange, but here was Mrs. Harman at eighty-one apologetic for being found in bed. It grieved her not to welcome me at the door, not to wave in the porch as I left. Downstairs, the senior partner looked a little forlorn. I sensed the tragedy of Darby and Joan walking hand in hand through the eighties. When one goes the other finds the void intolerable and slips off to the lost partner.

Mr. Harman was chopping wood in the cobwebby smithy that had echoed to his hammerings for sixty years. He complained that the log seemed very hard. I sympathised, and wondered how many of us, at eighty-five, would be log-splitting in such resolute form. How was my friend M'sieur Tissier, and wasn't he coming again soon? I explained that I had received a telegram to say that he had been

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delayed in coming owing to illness—he probably had a cold. The log came apart. Mr. Harman re-lit his pipe. I felt a little guilty for not having remembered a tin of tobacco. The pleasures of life were now mostly reduced to an arm-chair by the fireside, a pipe, and the prospect of early bed, adding, for summer-time, a cricket match on the home ground.

I left him tackling the second log, and arrived home just in time to hear the telephone ringing hard in the study. "Paris wants you." Paris? Then it must be Louis, perhaps to tell me when he was coming. A few moments later I heard the English voice of one of the kindest and best of friends. He spoke slowly, gently, obviously finding his message difficult. For a few moments I did not feel it was a real conversation; that familiar voice, speaking from Paris, came out of a dream. Louis had been taken to a nursing-home with pneumonia and pleurisy. There were lung complications. Specialists had been called in. Even if he came through the crisis of the pleurisy, there was little hope—he might last a month, at most, six weeks.

I asked questions—yes, the suddenness of it all had surprised everybody. He had caught a terrible chill up in the mountains during his 'service,' had had a hæmorrhage, and now lay dying. The voice went on, an unreal voice speaking in an unreal world. It ceased.

I turned from the telephone. Outside the gardener was trimming the vine under my window. The last glow of the chill afternoon reddened the beechwoods on the hill. A month, at most, six weeks. It was

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fantastic. Louis, twenty-five, as strong as a lion, dying in Paris. Beyond my window rose the wall of the unfinished garden-house, with his brickwork showing above the garage. Less than a month ago. Suddenly I remembered I had scolded him for looking a little thin in the face. I knew he worked too hard in Paris. He laughed scornfully, carrying a dozen bricks like a piece of paper.

The budgerigar chirped in its cage as I stared out at our building. I looked at the bird resentfully. Such a little thing could conserve the vital flame, while Louis was doomed. Then, I remembered how he had bought it for me, and it was trebly precious.

Contrary to my expectation he looked very bright, but it was a false brightness, with a tell-tale flush in the cheeks. He knew nothing of the seriousness of his case, which it had been thought wise to keep from him. His temperature remained terribly high, except for dangerous fluctuations that looked like the record of an earthquake. There had been a second consultation of the specialists, and a lung operation had been attempted and had failed.

For several days I went in and out of the nursing-home, and a conviction grew in me, shared by my friend, that, if one must die, this atmosphere of white walls, white-uniformed nurses, rubber-tyred trolleys, porcelain-shaded lights, disinfectants, and whisperings outside a numbered door, made the dreadful business more dreadful. Could we find a sunny flat, and get his mother in to nurse him? The idea occurred during a Sunday afternoon's walk by the Trocadero,

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rapidly being dismantled. It added to our depression, with its roofless war-stricken appearance. In a shop door-way a list of *appartements meublés* caught our eye. One seemed suitable. We sought it out. Heaven guided our steps. It was high up, airy, full south, well-furnished, with all we could desire, to let by the month. It was a few yards from the doctor and my most capable friend. We took it.

The battle was now before us. The doctor and the matron had to be won over. The latter shook her head. In his condition it was unthinkable. The doctor had grave doubts. We argued, we promised the utmost care. Quiet, air, sunshine, above all his mother to nurse him. Yes, even if only for a month. Finally, the doctor consented. The matron must have thought us mad or murderers, perhaps both.

Louis was moved half an hour before I was compelled to return to England. I kept away, since it was a professional business, but from my friend's house I saw the ambulance car pass, its red-cross flag fluttering down the avenue of leafless plane trees. A few minutes later I followed, to find Louis propped up in bed, smiling happily, as the sunshine poured over him.

"You approve?" I asked.

"*Mon cher*, it is wonderful!" he cried, and I saw he was near to tears in his gratitude. And there stood the world's best nurse, his mother, at the foot of the bed. She knew the sad truth now, which we had kept from her. And as I looked at her I saw in her face the unconquerable courage of a woman who faced the most powerful and pitiless of all adversaries.

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Only a few minutes now. My taxi waited below. Somehow I contrived to say good-bye, with a false cheerfulness.

"I shall come over to Pilgrim Cottage for Christmas," said Louis, not knowing that I was going because to stay would be to awaken a suspicion we wished to quiet until the inevitable hour.

"Of course—but don't hurry things," I replied, lying stoutly.

"We'll put the roof on—so leave it till I come."

"Very well—till you come," I said.

Somehow I got out of the room.

IV

I tell this sad story only because it has a hopeful ending. Three weeks passed and Louis puzzled the specialists. He should have been nearly dead, his temperature chart endorsed this view. Yet he was obstinately alive. He even demanded pencil and paper to send me a line. "Since one hour I am enjoying a lovely and warm sunshine. Now, speaking of me, because you want to know—yesterday the temperature has been at its lowest. To-day I cough a lot so giving me more temperature, it is unfair!"

I felt, as I read, it was all monstrously unfair, at twenty-five. How he had made himself loved in my circle! The telephone rang incessantly, letters came from the most unexpected sources. "Louis must not die. It is impossible," declared one. "We will not believe it!" said old Mrs. Harman. A week more

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passed. Another letter from Louis came. "I make hard fight with the microbe who loses," he wrote. When we read this we almost cheered. We saw Louis, in those bricklaying corduroy shorts and vest, with the gloves on, soundly punching the microbe in the corner of the ring. Bravo, Louis! Another one like that!

Ten more days. That deadly temperature does not fall, but Louis holds on. The doctors are sorely puzzled. It is all very unusual. There is a fresh consultation. Any hope? Well, they will wait and see. I delay my return to Paris. I postpone my sailing for Florida. Christmas creeps near. Snow falls, the old cottage looks like a Christmas card, a study in black and white, with a robin gay on the chimney-pot and a cat's footprints across the snow-covered lawn. A week before Christmas another letter comes. Already Louis has journeyed a fortnight beyond the grave, according to the specialists. He is still punching the microbe hard.

"I wish you a very happy Christmas," he wrote. "I will think specially of you in front of the log fire—for years we have been so used to spend quietly reading in front of the log fire our Christmas evening that I shall imagine this time that I am at your side."

And since Pilgrim Cottage at Christmas expects Louis, who helped to make its fireplace, and did a hundred kind things for the old house, I placed the winged chair he loved in front of the fire that Christmas Eve, put on the log, and then, blessed be the miracle of science, telephoned to Louis in bed in Paris, and said: "Your chair's waiting at the fireside,

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the log's blazing, Ethel's brought in the coffee, and it's really time you were here, my boy."

And Louis answered across the wintry sea. "How nize, my dear Cecil. I can hear the log flapping, I think! Two lumps in the coffee, please, for the French boy who has been kept in bed."

A FLIGHT OF FANCY

For B. N.

*All day at my desk, as I wrote and wrote,
A thrush in the garden sang note on note :
And a vain thought came as I blotted a line—
If my words were birds, and this book of mine
Turned into a thrush's nest, these pages
Might sing their way to future ages !*

CHAPTER XIII

AND NOW GOOD-BYE

WE have come to the end. I must leave you, my kind reader, and I must leave Pilgrim Cottage. The taxi is ticking at the garden gate, my luggage has all gone out. Bless me, if my housekeeper isn't in tears! "Come, come, I might be going to the end of the world!" I chide.

"It is the end of the world!" she complains, giving my attaché case a last polish.

Florida is a long way, but not so far that I cannot come back. This journey to the orange groves and the land where winter seems summer is really the completion of a circle. I started this country saga with, "It was in Florida that a sudden desire possessed me for a cottage in England. I had never before wanted anything as on that sunny Christmas Day I wanted a cottage in the English country-side."

That desire has been generously fulfilled through the five years that these ancient tiles have sheltered me. It is sad that I shall not see in Florida the old lady who reproved me for not owning a garden in England. A neighbour of hers, who has lately visited me, informed me she is dead. She was right in being indignant because I was missing an Englishman's inheritance. The white cliffs of

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Dover, the red soil of Devon, the fountain at Piccadilly, the column in Trafalgar Square, these things may quicken the heart of the exile come home. But it is one's own corner, one's own fire-side, the familiar patch of lawn, the known apple-tree, the dormer windows, the pattern of sun and shadow, that mean most, that bind the heart with dear associations.

So I looked at my old cottage gratefully. What happiness it has sheltered, what friends I have gathered under its bent roof. I leave it in winter's grip, the vine leafless, the rambler roseless, only the winter jasmine in yellow flower. The four poplars are barren and more straight than ever. The apple-trees raise a grille of iron across the wintry sky. The flower beds are grim and bare. But I am not deceived. I know now the swift miracle of spring, the crowding blossom, the unfurled leaf, the joyous resurrection of colour that makes gay this paradise I labour in and love.

Five springs, five summers have I known here, in days of glorious sunshine, in rain, in greyness, but never once in dullness. The count of summers that remain I cannot know, but, be it one or forty, there is a treasure laid deep in the heart's core that none can ever steal. The blackbird that flutes in my tree, the thrush that at evening sings by the gate, the robin that perches on my sill to chide me for labouring indoors on such a worm-promising morning, will all be here on my return. I shall be vain enough to think they have missed me, are pleased to see me.

AND NOW GOOD-BYE

And if I should tell them that, since seeing them in this old garden, I have crossed oceans, traversed jungles, ridden through miles of orange groves, seen vast man-made chasms of masonry, sunned myself on strands by the Mexican Gulf, and wandered in glades trodden by the native Indian, I think they might say, could they speak—"Yes, yes. But have you seen anything better than this spray of apple-blossom, the gold of your laburnum, the snowy crown of your syringa, and the way the purple clematis falls over that old porch of yours?" And I should truthfully admit I had not, and I would add, in excuse, that I had only gone away in order to have the excitement of coming home.

Next spring, next summer, next autumn, next winter, how full of promise each quarter of the year! I will not again be so late with those anemone seeds, I will try different hyacinth bulbs, I will bind up the phloxes before they are permanent cripples, I will not allow the dandelions to get ahead of me in their seeding, nor the bindweed to strangle so many plants, nor let the drought snatch the golden privet. And this coming summer I will have a soft-water butt, and mend the baffling leak in the garage roof, and catch the green-fly in time. Nor shall autumn again find me napping, with lupin seeds that I wish to gather popping out of their pods, with the rambler entangling the gutter-way, and the rock garden an overgrown wilderness. As for winter, I will lift all bulbs in good time, place early orders for the shrubs I want, nor fail to bind with straw all outside pipes against that sudden freeze one

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never believes possible till too late. Nor will I forget the——

But enough, or rather, too much, for have I not books to write and visits to make? One last look round. I have forgotten to give the well-head a coat of solignum, and to make a channel in the path where rain always collects. Once again I am aware of four incongruous tiles that patched the roof when I came five years ago, and which, since that time, I have always been going to remove. Dear me, there is no end to it—nor does one desire it. The garden-house, too, remains unfinished, awaiting Louis. He will be a long time coming, but that he will come I am firm in my hope. Then, perhaps as before, we shall walk up the hill to Mrs. Harman's, and drink her parsnip wine, and come home singing in the darkness, *Parlez-moi d'amour, redites-moi des choses tendres*.

Tender things! I am grateful for so much, for the five years of peace and happy labour after a stormy voyage through youth to manhood. Pilgrim Cottage has been a place of good cheer, much laughter, as full of friendship as it is of books, with no more shadow than that made by sunshine. Two happy ghosts walk in the garden, one of a youth in his pride, the other of a woman in her beauty. They are most real on a still night when the old cottage is but an engraving of black and white on a sheet of moonlight.

And now good-bye. We have gone rustic, gone rambling, and gone afield. We have idled on the lawn, drifted downstream, seen homes of ancient beauty, and

AND NOW GOOD-BYE

heard strange legends and histories in this corner of the Chilterns.

I close the gate, but not to shut you out. Behind it the eternal purpose works in the wintry garden, that our return may be greeted with bird-song and flowers.

THE END

